

The trumpet's blast: the political theology of John Knox

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## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this research is to show that the Scottish reformer, John Knox, while seen by many as a political figure, was religiously motivated in his thought, writings, and ministry. Knox saw himself as an Old Testament style prophet who sought to blow his Master's trumpet by proclaiming an unpopular message to the realms of both Scotland and England. Knox was deeply rooted in the Old Testament theology of the covenant. He believed that following an idolatrous path, most notably in the continuing practice of the Catholic Mass, meant the breaking of the covenant with God, as with the transgression of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. He proposed that an aristocratic resistance by the lesser magistrates would result in deposing the idolatrous rulers and restore the realms of Scotland and England to a genuinely covenanted relationship with God.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Le but de cette thèse est de montrer que le réformateur écossais, John Knox, fut un homme de foi religieuse et, contrairement à l'opinion populaire, non un homme de politique. Sa foi l'a motivé dans sa pensée, ses écrits, et son ministère. Knox vit lui-même comme un prophète vétérotestamentaire qui voulut sonner le trompette de son seigneur pour proclamer un message peu populaire au royaume d'Écosse aussi bien que d'Angleterre. Knox fut enraciné dans la doctrine vétérotestamentaire de l'alliance. Il crut que célébration de la messe catholique fut une piste idolâtre, rompant l'alliance avec Dieu, de même façon que le peuple dans l'ancien testament transgressa cette alliance. Il proposa que une résistance par l'aristocratie, les magistrats inférieurs, aurait abouti à une déposition des souveraines idolâtres et restaurer royaumes d'Écosse et Angleterre à leur alliance avec Dieu.

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## Introduction

John Knox believed that his calling in life and ministry was to “blow his Master’s trumpet.”<sup>1</sup> What exactly does this statement mean? It is well known that the Old Testament heavily influenced Knox. One of the most famous narratives of the Old Testament is the story of the conquest of Jericho, wherein Joshua led the people of Israel to defeat the local inhabitants of that city simply by obeying the Lord’s command and by blowing the trumpets for seven days, thus insuring a timely conquer of the city. It could be argued that Knox wanted to replicate this conquering of Jericho in his own time with the subjugation of rebellious England and unrepentant Scotland. But was reforming the religious life of his people in Scotland his only concern, or did he also have in mind the reformation of the political establishment in Scotland? If indeed Knox was concerned with political reformation, was he open to the notion of active resistance to an unjust Ruler or did he adhere to the magisterial Reformers’ view that total obedience was due to kings since God appoints them? If Knox advocated resistance, is it allowed towards the rulers? Moreover, who has the responsibility to carry out that resistance? Is resistance properly pursued by popular uprising or by the intervention of the lesser Magistrate? And if indeed Knox had the desire to reform the political process in Scotland as well as the religious one, where does this reformation fall within his stated ultimate goal in life and ministry? But the important question that must be asked concerns his motive: was it primarily a political ambition, or rather, a religious one?

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<sup>1</sup> John Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. By Roger A. Mason (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ix.

It can be argued that Knox's motivation was religious even though it had political implications. Although numerous historians of Reformation political thought focus on Knox's theory of resistance in its sources, they fail to give due attention to the key motive behind it, namely Knox's prophetic calling; his vocation "to blow his Master's trumpet." This proclamation of the prophetic message to the nation carries in its wake profound political and religious changes. Such changes were necessary in order to allow Scotland to enter a covenanted relationship with God, the same type of relationship that England had embraced under the godly leadership of King Edward IV, but had failed to maintain with the rise of Mary Tudor. Therefore, for Knox to assume the prophetic voice, which he modeled after the Old Testament prophets, was not only his point of departure but was also his point of arrival. Indeed, the one absolute goal in his life and ministry was to "blow his Master's trumpet" and all the other consequences of political or religious reform were by-products of that prophetic calling. For Knox did not dream of becoming a political leader; the lines of authority were very clear in his mind. His call was to warn the nation against moral decay and disobedience to God, but he considered the responsibility of temporal leadership of the realm as belonging to the rulers appointed by God.

While it has been purported that Knox's motivation is religious, his theological and political views cannot be separated from the views that existed in Continental Europe, thus a historical background is necessary to our inquiry. Knox's sense of his prophetic ministry and his notion of the theology of the Covenant and its implication influenced his understanding of the relationship between church and State. He frequently

spoke of the consequences that would result if a covenanted nation with an unjust king should embrace idolatry.

In addition, his understanding of obedience to the civil authority in terms of its scope and limitation supports the view that Knox was religiously motivated. For, Knox stood firm within the magisterial reformers' tradition and maintained the principle that God appointed kings and queens to their positions of authority; therefore, resisting them means resisting God. However, at the same time, Knox warns Mary Queen of Scots that her power, which is conferred by God, is limited, and obedience to her is tied with her promotion of godliness in the land. Finally, Knox's views on resistance towards idolatrous Sovereigns and the responsibility of the lesser magistrate in that regard reveal a religious mindset.

In sum, this paper will explore a religious instead of political motivation of Knox. The first chapter will provide a historical background of Knox's life and ministry. The second chapter will reveal that Knox equated himself with the Old Testament prophets who warned the people of Israel of the consequences of breaking the covenant with God. Finally, chapter three will examine the notion and scope of political resistance in Knox's theological views.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Historical Introduction to the Political and Religious Situation In Knox's Scotland

#### Humble Beginnings

Before we can discuss whether Knox's motivations to reform Scotland were political or religious, it is imperative to examine the historical milieu. Although the purpose of this study is to examine his theological and political views, it is still of vital interest to the inquiry itself to situate Knox in his proper context and also to examine in particular various events in his life that may have shaped his thinking and his calling to the Christian ministry. The goal of this introductory chapter is to lay the foundation of this study by means of situating Knox within his times and to discuss some of the major relevant events in Scotland and England as well as on the Continent.

Knox was born in Haddington, Scotland around the year 1514, but there is no certainty of the exact date within that year.<sup>1</sup> The reformer's father, William Knox, was a merchant in that town and some of the ancestors of John Knox served in the forces of the Earls of Bothwell. Knox's parents died when he was still at an early age, and the young man was sent to live with his relatives, who decided that he should become a priest. He went first

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<sup>1</sup> Rosalind K. Marshall, *John Knox* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), 1. This is Marshall's date but standard reference works such as *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, s.v. "Knox, John", give the date as 1513.

to a grammar school and from there to St. Andrew's University, where he became a student of theology at St. Salvator's College. That college witnessed a major event just one year before the arrival of Knox when in 1528 Patrick Hamilton was burned at the stake for teaching Protestant "heresy." That event, indeed, had given rise to interest in Protestant teaching and had created an environment of intellectual curiosity on campus to which Knox was exposed and perhaps by which he may have been influenced.<sup>2</sup>

Through his life and training at St. Andrew's University, Knox arrived at his first encounter with Protestant thinking and theology. It was there that Knox came into close contact with the teachings of John Major and in particular, his thoughts concerning papal supremacy and his opposition to that claim of authority asserted by the Roman Church. Major was an eminent scholar both in the British Isles as well as in continental Europe, especially in France.<sup>3</sup> J. H. Burns has noted that Thomas McCrie, an eighteenth century theologian, held the view that John Major's political and religious ideas influenced Knox's theology, principally his views on the relationship between Church and State. However, Burns does not support McCrie's analysis, citing a lack of material and evidence in Knox's writings. Although Burns does agree that Knox would not have thought otherwise of challenging the claims of the unjustified authority by the papacy.<sup>4</sup>

Another important influence on how Knox viewed the Christian ministry was the wealth of the Church in Scotland. It was well endowed with revenue of about £400,000, while the Crown's revenue was merely about £40,000. This bounty was not used mainly to

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<sup>2</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 1-4.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Burns, "Knox: Scholastic and Canonistic Echoes", in Roger A. Mason, ed., *John Knox and the British Reformations* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 118, 128.

help local parishes or to serve the needs of the poor, rather, it was used for expenditures towards building cathedrals, abbeys, universities, and even towards personal legacies passed from one generation to another within priestly families. That *wealth* of the church made Knox aware of the pressing need of the local parishes, which were being ignored by the established church leadership.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Religious and Political Background**

One of the best and clearest historical accounts of the political and religious situation in sixteenth-century Scotland is W. Stanford Reid. He states “to understand why the Scots accepted the Reformation so enthusiastically or, in other words, to see how the ground was prepared for the Reformation’s seed, we first must look into the country’s history prior to the Reformation.”<sup>6</sup> With these words, Reid begins his analysis of the political and religious situation in Scotland during the Reformation and ultimately the victory the Reformation in Scotland. In studying this period, one may encounter many theories, which have emerged from the thought of various scholars, on the roots and the causes of the Reformation movement in Scotland. However, generally speaking, one must accept that there is a broadly agreed upon view concerning the nature of the Scottish Church. That broad view is that Scotland was hard-pressed between two major political forces, one being France, which was allied with the Papacy and the other being the English Crown. These two major political and

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<sup>5</sup> Marshall, *John Knox*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> W. Stanford Reid, “The Triumph of the Reformation in Scotland”, in Presbyterian Church in Canada, Committee for the Celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the Scottish Reformation, *Reformed and Reforming* (Toronto: Allan L. Farris, 1960), 19.

religious powers indeed shaped the political and religious situation in Scotland before and during the rise of the Reformation movement in that country.<sup>7</sup>

Reid presents the view that the Crown in Scotland at the end of the fifteenth century had come to resent the Papacy's involvement in Scottish religious affairs, especially the appointment of bishops and the control of the Church's finances and assets. In searching for that desired freedom from the control of the Roman Church, the Scottish Parliament in 1469 had declared Scotland to be an Empire. Such a decision had both political and religious implications that led eventually, for all sorts of reasons, to the end, by 1560 to adopt the *Scottish confession of faith* and end the Papacy's role in the nation.<sup>8</sup>

The other important Act of Parliament, which was for the time being in line with the Catholic Church, was the decision to ban the spread of German "heretical" Protestant teaching within Scotland. Therefore, by 1525, the Scottish Parliament had passed a law prohibiting any involvement or association with Protestant teaching. As a result of that law, Scotland attained its first Protestant martyr, Patrick Hamilton, who was executed for his Protestant convictions on 29 February 1528. Various historians have argued that the commencement of the Reformation in Scotland can be dated from Hamilton's martyrdom.<sup>9</sup>

Another aspect of that major political power that created tension between Scotland and England was Scotland's relationship with France. Around that time, the Scottish Crown and nobility had come to favor France over England, and for France's sake, Scotland foolishly went to war with England. Therefore, many Scottish men were killed including the

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: Church and Nation Through Sixteen Centuries* (Edinburgh: SCM, 1960), 50-53.

<sup>8</sup> Julian Goodare, *State and Society in Early Modern Scotland* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Donaldson, *Church and Nation*, 50.

King himself in the disastrous Battle of Flodden in 1513.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent to that ill-advised war and the death of the King, the Earl of Arran Regent who rose to power made several fatal mistakes towards England. Foremost, he agreed to a treaty of peace, which committed the royal infant, Mary, the future Queen of Scotland, to marry Henry VIII's son. Afterwards, however, the Regent denounced that same Anglo-Scottish agreement which, in turn, resulted in another invasion by the English, under the direction of Henry VIII himself, who instructed "his troops to devastate Scotland until nothing would be seen but blackened ruins."<sup>11</sup>

However, that attack instigated by Henry VIII harmed not only the English interests in Scotland, but it also caused a negative impact on the cause of the Reformation in Scotland. One can notice the negative influence of Henry VIII's heavy-handed policy towards Scotland in two ways. First, the Protestant movement was viewed as being in alliance with the English, which was at the time an invading force. Second, this caused the Regent to cast his lot more deeply with France and the Catholic Church. As a result, the progress of the Reformation in Scotland was delayed. Confronting these two major factors were the Roman Catholic French, on one hand, and the English, on the other, Scotland struggled to find its way to religious and political independence.

As events continued to unfold in Scotland, increased advancement of the Protestant movement was occurring. Around that same time, a new figure of the Protestant movement in Scotland was about to emerge. In June of 1544, George Wishart returned to Scotland from abroad. He had spent time in Switzerland, where he was exposed to the teaching of both John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. Wishart was a man of considerable strength and he gave

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<sup>10</sup> Donaldson, *Church and Nation*, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Reid, *Reformed and Reforming*, 28.

Scotland its first encounter with the historic Protestant confessions by translating the *First Helvetic Confession* in 1536 which was published in 1548.<sup>12</sup> At this point in time, Knox became Wishart's close companion, and, indeed, some historians mention that Knox, carrying a two-handed sword for protection, served as a bodyguard for Wishart.<sup>13</sup>

After touring the country preaching the Protestant cause, the situation became increasingly dangerous for Wishart, who continued to stir up trouble for the leaders of the Catholic Church. In 1546, Cardinal Beaton ordered the burning of Wishart at the stake, and his mourners avenged his death by slaying Cardinal Beaton and seizing his Castle within a few months of Wishart's death. Knox joined this group, known as the Castilians, almost one year later, around Easter of 1547.<sup>14</sup> Knox's private instructions, from the Gospel of John, to some of the children of the nobility and his ability to teach the Scripture brought him renown and, as Sefton notes, "from then on Knox had no peace until he consented to become a preacher."<sup>13</sup>

The factors, which compelled Knox to become a preacher, are not fully understood, but Marshall points to the pressure that John Rough, a Protestant preacher at the castle, exerted on him publicly to accept the call to the ministry of preaching. She mentions that when Knox was confronted with this pressure to accept his ministerial calling, "he burst into tears and fled back to his chamber."<sup>14</sup> Eventually, Knox accepted the call and thus preached his first Protestant sermon. He fully enlisted himself in the Reformation cause by delivering a message, based on a passage from the Book of Daniel, wherein he attacked the Roman

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<sup>12</sup> Carol Edington, "John Knox and the Castilians: A Crucible of Reforming Opinion?", in Mason, ed., *Knox and Reformations*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Henry R. Sefton, *John Knox* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 17-18.

Church and the authority of the Pope.<sup>15</sup> Knox himself speaks of that occasion as he was returning to Scotland as a slave on board a French galley saying, “I see the steeple of that place where God first in public opened my mouth to His glory, and I am fully persuaded, how weak so ever I now appear, I shall not depart this life till my tongue shall glorify His Holy Name in the same place.”<sup>15</sup>

By the time that Knox had fully joined the ranks of the Reformation movement, the actual situation had not turned out to the advantage of the Castilians. The help that they had hoped to receive from England did not materialize. Instead, the French fleet launched an all-out attack on the castle, which resulted in the defeat of the Castilians. As a result, Knox ended up serving as a galley slave in the French Navy for two years, where he suffered from harsh conditions of bondage. The French spared his life and eventually released him from this captivity. While Knox was in France, the situation in Scotland had not improved much in favour of the Reformation movement. Mary of Guise, the Queen Mother, became Regent and formed an alliance with France by promising her daughter in marriage to the son of the French king, a development that had the potential to unite the Crowns of France and Scotland. Meanwhile, Knox had moved to England.<sup>16</sup>

### **Knox’s Life in England and on the Continent**

After his release from the French galleys in 1549, possibly as a result of the English Crown’s interventions on his behalf, Knox found himself in England during the reign of King Edward VI. He was given permission to preach and the Privy Council sent him to Berwick

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<sup>15</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland*, ed. Charles J. Guthrie (Edinburgh: the Banner of Truth Trust, 1898), 95, 96.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 68

to serve the cause of Reformation in that part of England. Knox arrived in that northern area of England, which borders Scotland. There, he ministered to English soldiers who were returning from war in Scotland. Knox's ministry was not limited to these soldiers, but extended also to many of the middle class communities there, as well as to other people from Scotland who would cross the border to hear him preach. Knox impressed the people in his congregation, largely owing to his style of preaching, its fluency, and his sense of humor. Knox did not lose any time in launching an attack upon the Catholic Mass and on other teachings of the Roman Church while he was serving that congregation.

Knox began to run into trouble with the Council of the North under the leadership of Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of Durham.<sup>17</sup> That Council by no means welcomed with any sympathy the changes unfolding in the Church of England and the new direction being taken towards the Protestant Reformation. Knox was summoned to give a defense of his theological views. Although England at the time of King Edward VI was Protestant, the roots of the Reformation, for all that, did not penetrate alike into all parts of the nation. Especially in the northern areas, there still were some Roman Catholic strongholds. Knox was in the Diocese of Durham where Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall continued to uphold his Roman Catholic view of the Mass.<sup>18</sup>

At any rate, Knox was asked to defend his views, not in private, as usual, but in public before the Council of the North. A meeting to do so took place at the parish church of Newcastle on 4 of April 1550 where Knox delivered a sermon against the Catholic Mass in

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<sup>17</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 34, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 36.



his *Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry*.<sup>19</sup> In that sermon, Knox states that “the mass is idolatry all worshipping, honoring, or service invented by the brain of man is the religion of God without his own express commandment, is idolatry the mass is invented by the brain of man, without any commandment of God therefore it is idolatry.”<sup>20</sup> Knox’s arguments were both persuasive and logical. A large number among his congregation already had accepted Protestant views; therefore, the members of the Council of the North, reluctant to risk a public riot, allowed Knox to go free and he heard no further from the Council.<sup>21</sup> The importance of this incident in Knox’s life and upon his theological positions later is very considerable.

He then took up the issue of the Mass as the very heart of his argument against the rule of Mary Tudor in England and, later on, with the young Mary Queen of Scots. For Knox, it was impossible to allow a Ruler of the State to advocate the practice of the Idolatry of the Mass and thus to lead the people along the path of false religious practice. In fact, in Knox’s encounter with Mary Queen of Scots, he referred to his ministry in Berwick and how he had defended the true teaching of the Gospel and had spoken out against this very impiety, which, in Knox’s vocabulary, is a reference to the Roman Catholic dogma concerning the Mass. As Knox says,

The papists allege, and boldly have affirmed, that the mass is the ordinance of God and the institution of Jesus Christ, and a sacrifice for the sins of the quick and the dead. We deny both the one and the other and affirm that the mass as

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<sup>19</sup> Sefton, *Knox*, 7-9.

<sup>20</sup> *The Complete Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, vol. 3, (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), 34.

<sup>21</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 35, 36.

it is now used is nothing but the invention of man, and there is an abomination before God and no sacrifice that ever God commanded.<sup>22</sup>

Knox ministered in different places in England for close to five years. He became one of six Chaplains to King Edward VI and was offered the bishopric of Rochester, but refused it because “his vocation was that of a preacher, not an administrator, and he had to be free to say what he thought and preach the word of God.”<sup>23</sup> When King Edward VI died in 1553 his sister Mary Tudor became Queen. Knox hoped that she might continue to promote the Protestant Reformation. His expectations to that end failed when Mary reinstated the Roman Catholic Mass once again. On the advice of his friends, Knox departed England for Dieppe, France. Regarding this departure, Sefton notes that “Knox is not sure why he fled England, but he is sure that the fear of death was not the main cause.”<sup>24</sup>

From Dieppe, Knox proceeded to Geneva in 1554 to seek guidance from the Reformers there on the main question that he had on his mind, namely what to do with a Sovereign who encourages false religion, enforces idolatry, and condemns true religion.<sup>25</sup> Knox did not obtain much in the way of an answer from Calvin, who “took the conventional view that it was against nature for women to govern.”<sup>26</sup> At the same time, Calvin did not encourage Knox to rebel openly against such a monarch. Eventually, Calvin referred Knox

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<sup>22</sup> This address to the queen is found in Knox’s *History* (Laing MS, fos. 305r-308r and in *Works*, ed. Laing, vol. 2, 277-86). I cite here the text as edited in John Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 180.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 42.

<sup>24</sup> Sefton, *Knox*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Sefton, *Knox*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 71.

to Bullinger, in Zurich, who was willing to venture further and to hint to Knox “it was not necessary to obey a ruler who condemned the true religion and enforced idolatry.”<sup>27</sup>

Knox returned to Geneva in 1554 and spent time in prayer and study there under the mentorship of Calvin, but eventually he received a call to pastor an English congregation of Marian Exiles in Frankfurt, Germany. He received that call to pastoral work knowing that his friend Christopher Goodman was member of that congregation. Eventually Goodman supported Knox over Richard Cox in the controversy related to the use of the second Edwardian *Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>28</sup> The internal disagreement in that congregation was focused on the form of worship and the use of the prayer book. Knox maintained a view that “he had been forced to accept it in England, but he was no longer willing to conform to something which he believed to be completely wrong.”<sup>29</sup> The congregation retained Knox for a while but matters deteriorated, when a new group of refugees arrived from England who included a number of prominent people from the English church. This group insisted on the use of the Book of Common Prayer as an integral part of the worship service in the Frankfurt congregation of English exiles.<sup>30</sup>

Knox eventually could not accept that situation and returned once again to Geneva, hoping for a quiet period of time during which he could study more under Calvin, in what he

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<sup>27</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> Jane E. A. Dawson, “Trumpeting Resistance: Christopher Goodman and John Knox”, in Mason, ed., *Knox and the Reformations*, 132.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 79.

<sup>30</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 79.

referred to as “a free Christian city” where the Gospel of Christ is preached without restraint from the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church and Bishops.<sup>31</sup>

### **Knox Back in Scotland**

After a few months in Geneva, Knox received word from some of the nobles that he was needed in Scotland to further the cause of the Reformation. There was then a kind of wishful thinking, which eventually proved wrong, that Mary of Guise was becoming more sympathetic to the Protestant cause. She may have pretended that, but she did so more as a political maneuver than from sincere conviction, in order to ensure the support of Parliament to grant the Crown to her daughter’s future French husband the Dauphin. Mary of Guise, however, did allow some degree of tolerance towards Protestants, even to the extent that some of the English Protestant preachers took refuge in Scotland at the beginning of the reign of Mary Tudor.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of these expectations, the leaders of the Reformation hoped that upon Knox’s return he would become the leader who would rally their troops and guide them to achieve their dream to transform the nation in the way of the Protestant Faith. Knox was reluctant to leave Geneva to return to Scotland, but he accepted the invitation and arrived in Edinburgh in September 1555. When he arrived, there was much at hand awaiting him. Many Protestants were still attending Mass, which for Knox was the unacceptable practice of idolatry.<sup>33</sup> Eventually, Knox undertook a tour of the country where he preached what he

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<sup>31</sup> *The Appellation of John Knox from the Cruel and Most Unjust Sentence Pronounced against Him by the False Bishops and Clergy of Scotland, with his Supplication and Exhortation to the Nobility, Estates and Commalty of the Same Realm* (Geneva: [Jacques Poullin and Antoine Reboul], 1558). I cite from the edited text in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 76.

<sup>32</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 87, 88.

<sup>33</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 89, 90.

firmly held to be the true Christian Gospel and, not very surprisingly, shocked some by celebrating Communion in the Protestant manner. The Roman Catholic faction later criticized his actions, summoning Knox to Edinburgh to stand trial for heresy. Upon the tactical intervention of the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise, the trial did not materialize, and, in fact, Knox was able to preach publicly in the city. Later, Knox realized that the Queen Regent would not convert to the Reformed teaching and he even felt his life to be in danger. By this time, after Knox had spent a year and half in Scotland, he received an invitation to be one of the pastors of the English parish in Geneva. Thus, sometime in 1554-5 Knox returned to the continent with his new bride, Marjorie Bowes, whom he had married in Scotland.<sup>34</sup>

Nearly one year after Knox's departure from Scotland, the nobles invited him back yet again. After a period of delay and hesitation on both sides, Knox eventually arrived for the second time in Scotland after having made a painful farewell to his wife and sons in Geneva. However, back in Geneva in the spring of 1558, Knox had worked out part of the political theory of what he called 'a godly revolution,' in which he wrote to the nobles in Scotland telling them "that they had the duty to suppress idolatry and establish true religion, even against the wishes of the monarch."<sup>35</sup> One can notice a Calvinistic influence that shaped Knox' mind, especially here in regard to the role of the lesser magistrate in preserving and defending true religion. It is worth noting that Knox worked out his theory of resistance while he was still residing in Geneva and still under the influence of Calvin.

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<sup>34</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 93, 95.

<sup>35</sup> Sefton, *Knox*, 21.

In his *Institutes of Christian Religion* Calvin mentions some of the duties of the magistrates by stating that they have the duty to defend God's honour in the realm by caring for both the divine law and the administration of justice to people:

And we have already shown that these duties are especially enjoined upon them by God; and it is fitting that they should labor to protect and assert the honor of him whose representatives they are, and by whose grace they govern..<sup>36</sup>

As we examine Knox's views on the rule of the civil magistrates in chapter three, we will notice Calvin's influence on him especially in the area of what one can call the progressive rule of the magistrates. That role is not only limited to provide justice and maintain peace in the temporal realm for the people, but to ensure also that the honour of God is protected in the nation by continuous obedience to His Law.<sup>37</sup>

Now Knox found himself back again in Scotland in the summer of 1559, arriving at Leith, where he undertook a "showdown" with the Catholic Church and with the Monarch. In November of 1559, Knox preached one of his most powerful sermons to the Lords of the Congregation in which he exhorted them to trust in God during this difficult time.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile the Queen Mother took actions against the Reform movement and forbade anyone to celebrate the Mass, except for duly ordained Roman Catholic priests. In response to the Queen Mother's political maneuver, the Lords of the Congregation negotiated a treaty with England wherein they besought protection from the French. Elizabeth I, by now the reigning Queen of England, supported the Protestant faction in Scotland. A campaign

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<sup>36</sup> John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis* 4.20.9; *Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1960), 1495.

<sup>37</sup> See below, chapter 3, the section on the civil magistrates.

<sup>38</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 144, 145.

began to frustrate the intentions of the Queen Mother in Scotland. An English army of nine thousand, in addition to the two thousand Scottish mercenaries, attacked the castle of Edinburgh and surrounded it, after a few attempts to take it, the situation suddenly shifted when Mary of Guise died suddenly on 11 June 1560. A treaty was signed in July 1560 between the French and the English, in which they both agreed to leave the Scots to determine their own affairs. The treaty made a provision that all matters of religion in Scotland would be dealt with through Parliament.

Parliament met on 10 July 1560 in Edinburgh to consider making Scotland an officially protestant country.<sup>39</sup> The Parliament requested Knox and five other fellow-reformers to draft what came to be known as *The First Book of Discipline* for the maintenance of the new reformed Scottish church and on 27 January 1561 eventually approved it.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that *The First Book of Discipline* received civil recognition unlike the *Second Book of Discipline*, which was drafted by Andrew Melville in 1578 to support the case of Presbyterianism over a modified Episcopacy.<sup>41</sup> *The First Book of Discipline* expressed an affirmation of the protestant doctrine in regard to many areas in the life of the church and the nation; its acceptance by the Parliament declared the Reformation as having finally triumphed in Scotland.<sup>42</sup> Knox's life and career certainly did not end at that point, but the day had finally come for him to witness the victory of Reformation principles in Scotland.

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<sup>39</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 151.

<sup>40</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 154.

<sup>41</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. "Discipline, Books of".

<sup>42</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 151,152.

Examining the historical background of the life Knox surely reveals the possibility of a political motivation in his teaching and theology and yet the seeds are also there to hint to the religious foundation of his thoughts that motivated him to reform the nation and introduce it to a covenanted relationship with God.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Aspects of the Biblical and Theological Foundations of Knox's Political Theory

Knox's self identification with the Old Testament prophets suggests that his motivation to reform the nation was religious. Although prophets in the Old Testament had both political and religious criticisms, they would clearly not be considered prophets without a claim of divine inspiration; otherwise, they would be merely political inquisitors. Knox's main prophetic message was not just aimed at the political establishment but also at the religious authority claiming that they had both broken the covenant with God and have led the realm into spiritual bankruptcy and despair. This concept of covenant in Knox's theology is the very foundation of his program for reforming the nation.

#### A. Knox as a prophet who blows His Master's Trumpet

The religious ground of Knox can be found in Roger A. Mason's introduction to *John Knox on Rebellion*. Mason notes that Knox was not alone among Protestant preachers in identifying himself with the voice of the Old Testament prophets, especially the prophet Jeremiah. Mason states that

Knox was not alone among Protestant preachers in turning to the prophets for inspiration and example, but his sense of kinship with them was unusually strong. Time and again in his writings he had recourse to the careers of Isaiah, Ezekiel and particularly Jeremiah to justify his conduct. . . . [This] was also founded on Knox's deep-rooted conviction that, like his biblical predecessors,

he had an ‘extraordinary’ vocation which bound him to proclaim the divine will and [to] warn the disobedient of the fearful consequences of their iniquity.<sup>43</sup>

On the same theme of Knox’s prophetic ministry, Richard G. Kyle observes “Knox’s prophetic consciousness began early in his career and never left him.”<sup>44</sup> Kyle notes moreover that Knox’s relationship with Wishart had presented him with the model of what could be described as ‘the Protestant understanding of prophecy.’ Knox’s first sermon was taken from chapter seven in the Book of Daniel, in which the reformer declared that the Roman Catholic as the last beast of the four beasts or kingdoms mentioned in the Prophet Daniel’s vision. Knox also described the Pope as the Antichrist.<sup>45</sup> Knox believed that his prophetic message was indeed from God to warn both the nation and the church of the severe danger of disobedience to God’s commandments. The encouragement that he had given to the ‘Scottish Congregation’ and the years that he had spent in French galley bondage shaped and confirmed his vision for that prophetic ministry.

In a number of his writings, we note that he refers to the role of the Old Testament Prophets in declaring the judgment of God on nations and upon sovereigns who practice the worship of idols and rule their people tyrannically. In applying that model to his prophetic ministry, he mentions in his *The First Blast of the Trumpet* that the blindness that has prevented people from acknowledging the danger of allowing the “cursed Jezebel” of England, Mary Tudor, to rule over them. Knox saw her rule as a sign of God’s approaching

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<sup>43</sup> Knox *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, ix.

<sup>44</sup> Richard G. Kyle, *The Mind of John Knox* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press 1981), 221.

<sup>45</sup> Edington, “Knox and Castilians”, in Mason, ed., *Knox and the Reformations*, 36; see also *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 1, 189-192.

judgment upon England as He judged Israel in the time of Jezebel in the Old Testament. I

Kings 16:31. Knox prayed to God and said,

But just and righteous, terrible and fearful, are thy judgements, O Lord! For as sometimes Thou didst so punish men for unthankfulness that man ashamed not to commit villainy with man (and that because that knowing thee to be God, they glorified thee not as God), even so hast thou most justly now punished the proud rebellion and horrible ingratitude of the realms of England and Scotland.<sup>46</sup>

In Knox's *Appellation to the Nobility and Estates*, Knox speaks of the effect of hearing God's warnings through the prophets to Israel in the Old Testament. He says, "First, that all Israel hearing the judgment should fear to commit the like abomination; and secondarily, that the Lord might turn from the fury of His anger, might be moved towards the people with inward affection, be merciful unto them, and multiply them according to His oath made unto their fathers."<sup>47</sup>

Knox therefore viewed his own role as that of a prophet who would deliver the warnings of God to his people; and in response, he expected God's people to receive those warnings in faith and repentance. Knox, in particular, would emphasize his role as a 'watchman' for the nation, especially with respect to England during the reign of Mary Tudor. Knox believed that although God gives to all of the elect knowledge of Himself, He granted to the prophets a special responsibility to pronounce His judgment. However, one has to note, as indeed Kyle points out, that Knox's understanding of prophetic ministry is more in the nature of "moral exhortation and admonition over that of prediction."<sup>48</sup> Indeed, this point

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<sup>46</sup> Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (Geneva: [Jacques Poulin and Antoine Reboul], 1558). I cite the text as edited in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 25-26.

<sup>47</sup> *Appellation* in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 100, 101.

<sup>48</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 222.

is of considerable importance in distinguishing Knox's theology of prophetic ministry from the views of those who were to become known as the 'radical reformers'. The radical reformers' views lie more in the direction of understanding prophecy as foretelling the future (prediction) and of unleashing the consequences of that prophetic voice against monarchs and nations. This is not to say that a futuristic aspect does not colour Knox's prophetic ministry. On the contrary, he spoke and wrote of the positive potential impact upon the future for those who obey the Word and commandments of God in 'this present time' in which he lived.<sup>49</sup>

Kyle observes that Knox drew his prophetic understanding from the notions that he held of God and of the authority of the Scriptures. In his treatise, *Godly Letter* Knox claims "that his prophetic message rested not on the popular profane predictions of his [own devising] but on the truth of God's Word, the invincible justice of God, and the ordinary course of divine punishments from the beginning of time."<sup>50</sup> Knox's prophetic message depended more than that of any other magisterial reformer on the teaching of the Old Testament as the vital source of understanding how the life of the nation should be established under a strict biblical code that is dependant on the Word of God. In one of his letters, Knox points out that true religion and worship of God must be based on the Scriptures, not on mere human knowledge. By stating this, Knox defined his understanding of true prophecy as biblical and thus not open to an 'Inner Light' interpretations or to other subjective experience.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 223.

<sup>50</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 223.

<sup>51</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 223.

One can notice that there are two main elements in Knox's prophetic theology and his understanding of his ministry. First his manner or method of interpreting Scripture and second his view of God. Kyle and other readers of Knox's theology have noted that he used the Old Testament as well as the New Testament to prove his views about the religious and political situation of his own time. While scholars have found that Knox's use of the Old Testament differs from that of Calvin and, to some extent, Luther's as well--both of whom preferred to resort primarily to the New Testament as the source of their understanding of the relationship between the Church and the Nations-- Knox, for his part, used both Testaments to support his ideas about how properly to reform Kirk, the nation and the monarchy.

Knox drew parallels between the political and religious situations of his generation and time in Scotland and England; he drew parallels between these nations and the Israel of Old Testament Kingdom. Knox proclaimed that if both kingdoms, especially England, did not repent and be restored to the right and true religion, then God would punish them as he had punished both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of ancient Israel. For example, in *The First Blast of the Trumpet* Knox observes "Israel did universally decline from God by embracing idolatry under Jeroboam in which they did continue even unto the destruction of their commonwealth."<sup>52</sup> Knox likens the destruction that happened to Israel in the Old Testament times to what could happen to England under the leadership of Queen Mary Tudor since he believes that her rule over the realm is offensive to God just as the rule of Jezebel in

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<sup>52</sup> *First Blast* in *Knox On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 4.

the Old Testament. He says, “I am assured that God hath revealed to some in this our age that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire above man.”<sup>53</sup>

The other factor, which shaped Knox’s prophetic mind, as Kyle observes, is how Knox understands the nature of God. For Knox the essence of the divine Nature is immutability; because God never changes, therefore, his judgments and commandments never alter. As they applied during the time of the Old Testament to the sins of His people Israel, in the same way they would be applicable to the era of the sixteenth-century. Kyle writes that “this belief directed Knox to insist that God’s law be maintained in the commonwealths of Scotland and England as if these nations were Old Testament Israel; otherwise the same divine judgments the Hebrews had experienced would befall them.”<sup>54</sup>

The reason for this strict view which Knox held is that God would have to punish the commonwealths of both England and Scotland in the same way that He had done to Israel in the past, this being part of the nature of God’s justice. Knox proclaimed that “the justice of God is infinite and immutable, and what he damned in one place and in one time cannot be overlooked in another.”<sup>55</sup> God will judge the Roman Catholic Queen of England who was persecuting the Protestants in her land. Indeed, God will judge her by raising up a prophet to put an end to her cruel reign as Jehu of the Old Testament had done to Jezebel of the ancient kingdom of Israel. In Knox’s view, the punishment of England would be much more severe than that of Scotland, because England had become a covenanted nation with God under the

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<sup>53</sup> *First Blast* in Knox *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 224.

<sup>55</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 224.

rule of Edward VI, while Scotland had not yet made such a commitment with God but should do so.<sup>56</sup>

There are basically three main aspects of Knox's prophetic ministry to which it is essential to pay attention in our quest to understand his views. First, there is the challenge to the civil authority, especially royal interference with true worship and the imposition of the Roman Catholic Mass on the reformed Church in England. Secondly, the idolatry of the Roman Catholic Church, most notably the re-introduction of the Mass after the accession of Mary Tudor to the English throne, which in Knox's view has no biblical warrant or worth; this point is entailed in Knox's discussion of the question of obedience to the ungodly ruler discussed below in chapter three. The third area of Knox's prophetic ministry concerns his views on the notion of covenant, and the responsibilities the nation and the civil magistrates has under God's covenant and Knox's role as a prophetic voice to be a reminder of the covenant obligations and the grave consequences of breaking that covenant. Part of Knox's prophetic message to civil magistrates is to remind them of their responsibility in the society towards the poor and the way they are treated. He called for a careful inquiry into poverty and the conditions of impoverished folk in society. Knox maintained the need to avoid judging the poor or considering their poverty as punishment from God or even as the result of their laziness.<sup>57</sup>

Knox viewed his fight against the Mass as comparable to one of the Old Testament battles where God's prophets proclaimed judgment against the enemies of God's people.

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<sup>56</sup> *The Copy of a Letter Delivered to the Lady Mary, Regent of Scotland, from John Knox, Minister of God's Word, in the Year of our Lord 1556, and now augmented and Explained by the Author in the Year of our Lord 1558* (Geneva: Jacques Poullain and Antoine Reboul, 1558). I cite the edited text in Knox *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 203.

Sefton notes that Knox began to use the Old Testament's images of war and injustice particularly during his ministry in Berwick. Sefton states, "addressing a congregation which included many soldiers, [Knox] developed the use of terms of war and conflict in his sermons especially when attacking 'the idolatry of the mass.' He thought of himself as a kind of Joshua blowing trumpets around the walls of a modern Jericho."<sup>58</sup> He might appear as one of the other Old Testament prophets who were willing to pronounce the judgment of God in spite of any danger. Knox speaks of that voice of God in this language "[as] an odour and smell that cannot be suppressed, yea, it is a trumpet that will sound in despite of the adversary."<sup>59</sup>

Sefton's analysis is a good attempt to trace Knox's thought from an historical point of view. Knox did not develop his theology in a vacuum. He pastored English soldiers who returned to England after having supported the Protestant movement in Scotland. He saw in their military mission a divine purpose to aid the weak but righteous cause unfolding in Scotland. Perhaps at this stage, Knox began self-consciously to actuate in his own ministry the role of the Old Testament prophets. Indeed, it might be said that Knox spent his life sounding the trumpet of prophetic ministry both in England and in Scotland.

### **Knox's Views of His Own Prophetic Ministry**

So, what are the roots of Knox's extraordinary vision of the role of the prophet in the life of the nation and of the Church? This can best be approached through an examination of

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<sup>58</sup> Sefton, *Knox*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Letter to the Regent*, in *Knox On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 6.



some of his writings in which one can find Knox's religious motivation within the biblical and theological foundations of his political theory. Knox's views of the role of the prophet are plain to see in his *The First blast of the trumpet* when he explains the situation in Israel at the time of the prophets. In Knox's view, Israel had committed spiritual adultery in worshipping assumed gods other than Jehovah. As Israel became deeply involved in spiritual adultery, it experienced devastation and God's righteous punishment. That devastation was evident in the religious and political realms alike.

Knox proclaimed "[that] Israel did universally decline from God by embracing Idolatry under Jeroboam, in which they did continue even into destruction of their commonwealth."<sup>60</sup> Knox made use of this historical situation in ancient Israel as a sort of case study to warn both Scotland and England, in particular regarding the grave consequences that result from ignoring the commandment of God. For Knox, to embrace the Roman Catholic Mass and to allow Mary Tudor, a woman and a Roman Catholic to rule over the realm of England, were clearly an openly outrageous violation of the Old Testament's teaching. The spirit and the language that Knox employed to deliver his warning were in the spirit and the language of an Old Testament prophet. He saw himself as one who followed in the footsteps of Ezekiel and Jeremiah.<sup>61</sup> In his figurative *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, Knox provided details of the warnings that the prophets of Old Testament times had made and of the consequences of not obeying those warnings and, therefore, of ultimately coming to break the commandments of God.

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<sup>60</sup> *First Blast*, in *Knox On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *First Blast*, in *Knox On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 4.

*The First Blast of the Trumpet* offers insight into Knox's view of his own prophetic ministry. In that treatise, Knox reacted specifically against the accession of Mary Tudor to the English throne. In this same work, one can find, as well, an admonition towards Mary, Regent of Scotland and her daughter, Mary, Queen of Scots. The analysis of Knox's prophetic understanding begins by referring to his willingness to suffer for the cause of proclaiming God's Word, as a prophet would do. Knox affirms his willingness just as the Old Testament's prophets willed to suffer as a consequence of the actions and errors of the wicked kings of Israel. Knox exclaimed, "I shall be called foolish, curious, and despiteful and a sower of sedition... I know that the world offended (by God's permission) may kill the body, but God's majesty offended hath power to punish body and soul forever. His majesty is offended when that His precepts are contemned and His threatenings [were] esteemed to be of none effect."<sup>62</sup>

What, exactly, is the prophetic message that Knox desired to proclaim in *The First Blast of the Trumpet*? The message is very simple but also quite explosive in its impact upon the nation and the Church. Knox simply believed that women, especially Roman Catholics, should not become the Rulers of the realm either in England or in any godly commonwealth. Knox challenged his critics who maintained that the rule of women in the public realm was of no such major offense. Knox refuted their view by declaring, "I am assured that God hath revealed to some in this our age that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall

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<sup>62</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, 7.

reign and have empire above man. And yet with us all there is such silence, as if God therewith were nothing offended.”<sup>63</sup>

Knox was aware that prophetic messages such as this would cause a great deal of unrest and even anger in society and on the part of the political establishment. Nevertheless, he still believed it to be of such importance that he declared it regardless of its lack of popularity. Knox contends that “To such as think that it will be long before such doctrine come to the ears of the chief offenders, I answer that the verity of God is of that nature that, at one time or at other, it will purchase to itself audience. It is an odour and smell that cannot be suppressed, yea, it is a *trumpet* (my emphasis) that will sound in despite of the adversary.”<sup>64</sup>

Although it may seem in the mind of some that Knox’s statements regarding the rule of women as head of the realm could be construed to be outright involvement in politics, one must acknowledge the way that Knox understood their import. He is, in effect, that just man blowing his Master’s trumpet. In fact, Knox’s expressed views were in line with at least some of the church culture of his time in terms of understanding the proper role that women had within the community. In that regard, Rosalind Marshall notes that Knox said nothing new in his *The First Blast of Trumpet* concerning women’s place and position in the communities of the middle Ages. She observes, “A woman had to obey her father. After marriage, she was expected to do what her husband told her.”<sup>65</sup> However, problems arose when Knox attempted to apply these principles of the subordinate female position in society

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<sup>63</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> *First Blast* in Knox *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 109.

to the question of ruling the Realm. The discussion of women's place in society took a new turn and gave rise to many debates due to the political events unfolding in the public life of the nation. Marshall surmises that "it was only when he came to the discussion of what subjects ought to do about a female ruler that he was breaking new ground."<sup>66</sup>

In his *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, Knox was primarily concerned about the situation in England. That situation began to deteriorate, at least from his point of view, after the accession of Mary Tudor. Her rule as a woman and as a Roman Catholic would entail hardships for the cause of the Reformation in England and, subsequently, in Scotland as well. As noted above, Knox, in general, compares the reign of Mary Tudor to that of Jezebel in the Old Testament.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, he viewed Jezebel both as a foreigner and as an idolater since she worshiped Baal. Likewise, Knox saw Mary Tudor as a foreigner since she was born of a Spanish mother, which made her a foreigner in the sight of the people of England. In addition, Mary Tudor was also deemed an idolater for she was a Roman Catholic. The decay of the nation under her reign was obvious since England was becoming prey to foreign nations and was slowly but surely returning to the folds of the Church of Rome. Under the rule of Mary Tudor, the godly Protestant community was beginning to weaken and even to suffer the martyrdom of excellent Protestants leaders, among them bishops Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer and many others as well. Therefore, Knox, regarding himself as a prophet, who was called to blow his master's trumpet, held it as his solemn responsibility to pose a challenge to her wicked rule and to cry out for the blood of the martyrs.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Marshall, *Knox*, 109.

<sup>67</sup>*First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 3.

<sup>68</sup>Marshall, *Knox*, 105, 110.

Knox remained firm in his belief that a godly sovereign must rule the nation promoting the teaching of God's word. Knox's principal way of achieving this goal was his deep sense of God's call, namely to be a prophet, who blows his master's trumpet until all the walls of idolatry and darkness fall in the life of the nation and the reign of Christ would prevail.

## B. The notion of covenant in Knox's theology

The very foundation of Knox's religious views is rooted in his understanding of the notion of covenant. He viewed the covenant as

the league between God and us, that He alone shall be our God and we shall be His people; he shall communicate with us of His graces and goodness, we shall serve Him in body and spirit; He shall be our safeguard from death and damnation, we shall seek to Him and shall flee from all strange gods. In making which league, solemnly we swear never to have fellowship with any religion, except with that which God hath confirmed by His manifest Word.<sup>69</sup>

This view of the covenant is expressed in Knox's open letter to the English nobility *An Admonition or Warning that the Faithful Christians in London, Newcastle, Berwick & Others, May avoid Gods vengeance*.<sup>70</sup> Knox wrote that letter during his departure from England after the rise of Mary Tudor to English throne. As we have found in the previous segment that Knox's deep sense of prophetic calling was his main motive in proclaiming his Master's message and blowing the trumpet of God's judgment. However, the question is how Knox arrived at this theological position. The answer could be found in Knox's treatment of the Old Testament teaching as well as theology in which he had a great interest, and which he applied to his understanding of the notion of the covenant. Indeed, the Old Testament teaching affected his thought profoundly. The narratives of the prophets and the history of Israel gave him the sense of his visionary calling which distinguished him from the other magisterial reformers.

In this section, we will examine Knox's views on the covenant from his writings and we will discuss it in the context of recent scholarly criticism. In his study of Knox's theology,

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<sup>69</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 190, 191.

<sup>70</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 190, 191.

Mason suggests that both Kyle and Greaves have provided a deep discussion of Knox's use of the covenant notion.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, in this section we will rely on both Greaves and Kyle to explore Knox's notion of the covenant.

In his analysis of Knox's views of the Covenant, Richard C. Greaves points out that Knox attempts to understand the nature of the relationship between church and nation. He did not look to the example of the reformed church in Geneva but rather directly to the Old Testament. One should notice the fact that the influence of the Old Testament is written all over the theology of Knox as we have pointed out before and will refer to as we go along explaining Knox's theology in this area.

The questions that should be asked are how Knox understood the biblical notion of the covenant and how did he apply it to the religio-political situation of his time, within his framework of reforming the nation and blowing his master's trumpet? As both Kyle and Greaves point out, Knox did not write systematically on the notion of the covenant or on any other matter largely. However, one can trace his views on the covenant in different parts of his writings. We begin by considering Greaves' views on Knox's notion of the covenant, which he traces back to what is considered the very beginning of Knox's development of the idea. Greaves points out that Knox addressed to the English nobility the treatise titled *An Admonition or Warning* at the beginning of Mary Tudor's reign around 1553-54 C.E. In that work, Knox warned the English Nobility of the grave consequences of allowing a woman and a catholic to gain the throne and thus break the covenant that the nation had established

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<sup>71</sup> Roger A. Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal, Political thought in Renaissance and Reformation Scotland* (East Lothian, Scotland: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 145.

under Edward VI.<sup>72</sup> Knox says that obedience to the “league or covenant” is required of all who live in the realm. He says, “First, it is to be observed, that God’s justice being infinite and immutable, requires like obedience in matters of religion of all them that be within his league, in all ages that He requires of any one nation or of any particular man in any age before us.”<sup>73</sup> Knox states further that the nobles’ obedience to the covenant means becoming an enemy to all the idolatrous: “why is it necessary that we avoid idolatry, because otherwise we declare ourselves little to regard that league and covenant of God; for that league requires that we declare ourselves enemies to all sorts of idolatry.”<sup>74</sup>

Greaves argues that around the time of Knox’s exit from England and the writing of this treatise, he came up with the idea that if a nation adopted the biblical teaching and covenant with God to follow his commandment and then abandoned that commitment, then that nation was in great danger of being in violation of God’s covenant and it exposed itself to His Judgment.<sup>75</sup> Mason points out that in Knox’s view England became a covenanted nation before the time of Mary Tudor. Mason says “in the case of England where, under Edward VI, the magistrates and people had ‘solemnly avowed and promised to defend’ God’s truth, Knox insisted that the terms of such a covenant still applied [in the time of Mary Tudor].”<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, Knox treats the notion of the covenant differently in the case of Scotland. Scotland was not yet a covenanted nation like England so the punishment of

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<sup>72</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian University Press, 1980), 115.

<sup>73</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 192.

<sup>74</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 193.

<sup>75</sup> Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 116.

<sup>76</sup> *Knox On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, xx.



breaking the covenant would apply only to the clergymen of the Catholic Church who knowingly broke the covenant of God by insisting on practicing the Mass. In Knox's address to Mary, Queen of Scots, he showed some unexpected flexibility in his position towards the rule of women in the monarchy: "I pray God, Madam, that ye may be as blessed within the commonwealth of Scotland, if it be the pleasure of God, as ever Deborah was in the commonwealth of Israel."<sup>77</sup> Mason notes that Knox's meeting in 1561 with Mary Queen of Scots was almost at the verge of the reformation triumph in Scotland and that Knox showed some flexibility towards the question of having a woman rule over the realm providing that she embrace the true religion.<sup>78</sup> However, in the case of England, Knox had previously shown no flexibility whatsoever to the expected rule of Mary Tudor over the realm of England. In the early 1550s Knox argued that Mary Tudor's rule broke the covenant with God which the nation had entered into under Edward VI simply because she began a reverse movement towards the Roman Catholic teaching. At the same time, Knox insisted that the rule of a woman over the realm was not lawful. For Knox, this meant a serious attempt to break the covenant with God and that it would have devastating consequences on the whole nation. As far as Elizabeth's rule, Knox did not have the best of a relationship. Elizabeth became very uncomfortable with him because of his views on the rule of women that were expressed in his writings. The publication of his treatise, *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, at

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<sup>77</sup> *History of the Reformation in Scotland* as cited in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 181; see also, Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 111.

<sup>78</sup> *History of the Reformation in Scotland* as cited in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 181.

the time of Elizabeth rise to the throne was very unfortunate. Knox did not want to attack Elizabeth but rather her sister Mary Tudor, who died shortly before the treatise was printed.<sup>79</sup>

There is an obvious inconsistency in Knox's position, concerning his dealings with the Queen of England Mary Tudor and Mary Queen of Scots. There are several possibilities to explain this variance. First, it could just be an inconsistency on his part, second, that it could reveal a development of his theology over time. A third option could be that he viewed England under Mary Tudor, as a covenant breaker, while he viewed Scotland, under Mary, Queen of Scots, as not yet a covenanted nation. However, one can notice that the historical situation in England was entirely different from that of Scotland. With Mary of England, Protestant reformers were being killed and even Knox was chased away from the country. It was a time of confrontation not reconciliation; however, in 1561 Knox's position was much stronger since the reformation had gained substantial ground in Scotland. Knox was willing to show more flexibility and graciousness towards Mary Queen of Scots providing that she would accept the teaching of the reform movement; thus showing an obvious religious motivation over political motivation. The underlying theme of all of these possibilities is that religion always took precedence over political order. As noted earlier, he had definite issues with gender, but his true concern was religious beliefs.

### **The elements of the covenant**

Therefore, one would have to ask then, what are the elements of the covenant between God and the nation that Knox was so determined to protect? Greaves suggests that Knox's view was that belonging to the covenant meant avoiding idolatry in all its shapes and

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<sup>79</sup> *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, s.v. "Knox, John". See also Roderick Graham, *John Knox, Democrat*, (London: Robert Hale, 2001), 33.

forms. In particular, that meant repudiating the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and the practice of the Mass. In the Old Testament, God instructed his people not to mix with the inhabitants of Canaan and not to adopt their religious belief systems. Knox says, “This is the league [covenant] between God and us that he alone shall be our God, and we shall be his people.”<sup>80</sup>

For Knox, the first element of the covenant is to be a condition to allegiance with God. He would be “our God” and we become “his people.” This demands that true worship of God has to be at very the center of the life of the nation. Any form of worship that does not honor the true exaltation of God in the land must be prevented and stopped. This element of the Covenant requires God’s people to remain faithful to him even in the time of provision and tribulation. Any form of fellowship with idols or with those who worship them is considered to be in violation of God’s covenant. Knox warned true believers in God against any form of fellowship with non-believers or idolaters for the following reasons. First, the non-believers could lure away true Christians from their adherence to the truth of God. Secondly, the idolaters are under God’s wrath until they either repent or are destroyed. Therefore, to have fellowship with them would endanger the believers of divine punishment. However, God will provide for believers’ needs by means of grace and mercy. He will reward his people for remaining faithful even during times of persecution and suffering from non-believers even if they were their own family or friends.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 116; see also *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 190.

<sup>81</sup> Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 116,117; see also *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 192.

In 1558, Knox wrote *The Appellation*<sup>82</sup> where he continued to elucidate his views on the covenant theology by advocating that godly believers and the nobles of the land must resist the ungodly sovereign on the basis of protecting the covenant. Knox also made this point in his proposed *Second Blast of the Trumpet* where he says,

but if either rashly they [ungodly sovereign] have promoted any manifest wicked person, or yet ignorantly have chosen such a one as after declare himself unworthy of regiment above the people of God (and such be all idolaters and cruel persecutors), most justly may the same men depose and punish him that unadvisedly before they did nominate, appoint and elect.<sup>83</sup>

The covenant with God then is the reason for resistance towards the ungodly, idolatrous Sovereigns. Knox's position is based on the Old Testament teaching, which emphasizes the idea that the ungodly rule ejected from the seat of the government. Knox appealed to the teaching of the Old Testament to support his views, especially the prophecies of Jeremiah who pronounced God's judgment on the ungodly kings and uttered the words of the new covenant.<sup>84</sup>

In *The Appellation*, Knox refers to the covenant King Asa established with the Hebrews in the Old Testament to serve God and maintain his true religion. The example showed that if the ruler or the people ignore that covenant, the consequences could be severe. The people will be punished and the King must be expelled from his throne.<sup>85</sup> Knox says,

And this is most evidently declared in that solemn oath and covenant which Asa made with the people to serve God, and to maintain his religion, adding this penalty to the transgressors of it; to wit, "that whosoever should not seek the Lord God of Israel should be killed; were he great or were he small, were it man, or were it woman." And of this oath was the Lord compleased, he was found of them, and gave them rest on ever part, because they sought him with

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<sup>82</sup> Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, xxvi.

<sup>83</sup> Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 128, 129.

<sup>84</sup> Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 119.

<sup>85</sup> Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 119.

their whole heart, and did swear to punish the offenders, according to the precept of his law, without respect of persons.<sup>86</sup>

Obviously, Knox is referring to the duty to punish the promoters of idolatry for breaking the league or the covenant of God even if they were civil or religious leaders.

In 1561, Knox repeated the same theme in his encounter with Mary Queen of Scots. He reaffirmed to her the biblical notion of obedience to the Sovereign conditional only upon the Ruler remaining faithful to the covenant and God. Otherwise, her subjects are entitled to be disobedient. First, Knox affirmed to her his full obedience, as a result of his belief in God:

But Madam, if the true knowledge of God and His right worshipping be the chief causes that must move men from their heart to obey their just princes (as it most certain that they are) wherein can I be reprehended? I think, and am surely persuaded, that your Grace have had, and presently have, as unfeigned obedience of such as profess Jesus Christ within this realm as ever your father or other progenitors had of those that were called bishops.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, Knox reminded her that her Authority is a gift from God that requires mutual respect and care towards her people within the context of the covenant:

Madam, that wrong is done unto you when ye are willed to be subject unto God, for it is He that subjects people under princes and causes obedience to be given unto them; yea, God craves of kings that they be, as it were, foster-fathers to His church, and commands queens to be nurses unto His people. And this subjection, Madam, unto God, and unto His troubled church, is the greatest dignity that flesh can get upon the face of the earth, for it shall carry them to everlasting glory.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, Vol. 4, 500, 501.

<sup>87</sup> *History in Knox, On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 176.

<sup>88</sup> *History in Knox, On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 179.

In this encounter with Mary Queen of Scots, Knox has laid out one of the major concepts of accountability of kings and queens both to God and to the nation within the concept of the covenant. We know that Mary Queen of Scots was not very impressed with Knox's views.<sup>89</sup> But Knox did challenge her to accept the notion that her true authority is not inherited but rather that she reigns because of God's grace and mercy and her authority consequently has limits. In her acceptance of her rule as sovereign over her people, she subjected herself not only to God and his covenant, but also to the people of God and the church. Knox warned the Queen that if, she broke the covenant with God, the people would be justified to resist her power through all means. Knox says, "If their princes exceed their bounds (quod he), Madam, and do against that wherefore they should be obeyed, it is no doubt but they may be resisted, even by power."<sup>90</sup> The ultimate consequence of breaking the covenant with God and the people would be to resist the ruler, even by force, in order to restore the nation once again into a covenanted relationship with God. Knox insists that the king, nobles, and the people should together observe the covenant. If any of these parties breaks the covenant, then the others must punish the covenant breakers. The covenant requires that the nobles and the lesser magistrates defend the true prophets and preachers against whoever persecutes them.<sup>91</sup> In Knox's *Appellation*, he reminded the nobles of their responsibility towards God and the nation to resist the rule of lawless and defend the true prophets of God in order to protect the covenant.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 164-167.

<sup>90</sup> *History*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 178.

<sup>91</sup> Greaves, *Theology and Revolution*, 120.

<sup>92</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 79-80.

In Knox's contribution to the debate at the General Assembly of June 1564 Greaves argues that he affirmed again the notion that the people of God have the duty to disassociate themselves from the Canaanites (i.e. non-believers), the people of the land, and to not make any league with them.<sup>93</sup> They should also resist idolatry even if it means disposing of rulers who break the covenant of God with his people. Knox addressed William Maitland as follows: "for I speak of the people assembled together in one body of a commonwealth unto whom God has given sufficient force, not only to resist, but also to suppress all kind of open idolatry; and such a people, yet again I affirm, are bound to keep their land clean and unpolluted."<sup>94</sup>

In his analysis of Knox's covenantal views, Kyle has raised two aspects of the covenant, one communal and the other personal. The communal aspect is found in the famous text where Knox affirms the element of the covenant and its responsibilities to the English nobility:

This is the league between God and us, that He alone shall be our God, and we shall be his people: He shall communicate with us of his grace and goodness; We shall serve him in body and spirit: ... flee from all strange Gods ... solemnly we swear never to have fellowship with any religion except with that which God has confirmed by his manifest Word.<sup>95</sup>

This aspect of the covenant is centered on the life of the nation as a whole. The Nation must commit itself to the worship of the One and only true God of Israel. In return, Israel will be fully blessed in every aspect of life. God will give the people his mercy. He will show them his goodness and they will respond to that goodness by obedience to Him. However, if this

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<sup>93</sup> *Letter to the Commalty*, in Mason, ed., *Knox On Rebellion*, 120

<sup>94</sup> This address was in a 1564 General Assembly debate as recorded in *History*. I cite from Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 196

<sup>95</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 155, see also *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 190-191.

covenant is broken, then God will pass his judgment upon the nation and its people. Knox says “if the league between God and us stand inviolate; if we will have the league to stand between God and us; that we cannot keep the league between him and us inviolate if we favor, follow or spare [the] idolatrous.”<sup>96</sup>

Kyle notes different aspects in Knox’s thought in regard to idolatry and the responsibility of the covenanted Christians. As members of God’s covenantal people, Christians must defend the covenant in a number of ways. First, they must abstain from idolatry, which, in his mind, clearly meant the Mass and all forms of association with the Roman Catholic Church. Secondly, they must actively resist idolatry, especially if they are kings or rulers of the realm. Kyle refers to Knox’s mention of Josiah’s commitment that he made between the King and the people.<sup>97</sup> Knox says,

the same is to be read of Josiah, who did not restore the religion, but did further destroy all monuments of idolatries which of long time had remained... he made a covenant that all the people from the great to the small, should walk after the Lord, should observe his law, statutes, and testimonies, with all their heart.<sup>98</sup>

Kyle’s points to another aspect of the covenant in Knox’s theology, which is not highly emphasized in his writing or in critical study of him, namely the personal baptismal element of the covenant. This side of the covenant cannot be broken and remains permanent. Of this aspect of the covenant, Knox says,

baptism is the sign of our first entrance in the household of God... by the which is signified, that we are received in league with him... that the league of God is of that firmness and assurance, that rather shall the covenant made

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<sup>96</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 155, see also *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 193-194.

<sup>97</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 156.

<sup>98</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 4, 489.



with the sun and moon, with the day and night, perish and be changed, than that the promise of his mercy made to his elect shall be frustrated and vain.<sup>99</sup>

It is clear from Knox's description of this kind of covenant that it cannot be broken and it is eternal, because the sign of that covenant is baptism, which gives a membership of association within the family of God. That membership remains forever based not on our own righteous acts but on the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls.<sup>100</sup>

Kyle's comment on this aspect of the covenant in Knox's theology refers to a lack of consistency. On one hand, Knox believes that the nation can break the league with God and be punished. Yet, on the other hand, the elect or the individually saved people can never break that covenant with God because it is not dependant on them but rather on Him, and the covenant is with them forever. Kyle is possibly correct in pointing out this inconsistency in Knox's views, but one must remember that Knox was dealing with different issues here. The *communal* covenant is related to the life of the nation as a political entity under God. If the nation becomes disobedient to God, the result will be a loss of their political independence and a punishment of their idolatrous worship. In the Old Testament, Knox found "a source book of 'legal' precedents which were as binding on the kingdoms of England and Scotland as they had been on Israel and Judah."<sup>101</sup> On one hand, his burning desire to see the nations of England and Scotland as true commonwealths serving God like the nation of Israel in the past was his main motivation to apply the concepts of the Old Testament to contemporary realms. But on the other hand, when it comes to the assurance of salvation of sinners, Knox

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<sup>99</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 155, see also *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 4, 123.

<sup>100</sup> Kyle, *Knox*, 155-156

<sup>101</sup> Mason, *Kingship and the commonweal*, 143.

stands firm within the magisterial reform tradition where he asserts that it is all by the grace of God. Mason points out that the possibility of Knox's conditional views of the covenant has been attributed by some scholars to the possibility of Knox being more influenced by Zwingli and Bullinger more than Calvin in that regard.<sup>102</sup> But that is a matter which needs to be debated further.

Ultimately, what is most important to emphasize is that Knox's religious views as a prophet proclaiming God's covenant to the people is the very foundation for his desire to see both England and Scotland being affirmed in a covenantal relationship with God. Surely, this can be seen in his dealings with the Queens of both England and Scotland. All of his confrontations with the sovereigns of both nations and his exhortations to the people reveal a profoundly religious mindset, which has one overriding goal, viz. to reform religion in both realms.

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<sup>102</sup> Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal*, 145.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The notion and scope of political resistance in Knox's theological views

In Knox's examination of the political aspect of the nation, the religious foundations and aspirations of his views are illustrated as he questions the political dynamics of the nation. First he defines what a godly ruler is and what the responsibilities of the people of the realm are towards such a ruler. Next, Knox uses the role of the lesser magistrate to ensure that the nation is ruled by biblical standards, which means that the definition of the godly ruler must be observed and the duties of the nation towards that ruler must be upheld. This demonstrates that Knox is religiously inspired in his attempt to reform the nation.

Under the leadership of the Roman Catholic religious establishment, according to Knox, both Scotland and England broke the precepts of the covenantal relationship with God. The only difference between the two nations was that England committed itself to the divine covenant by embracing biblical teaching and removing the idolatrous practice of the Roman Catholic Mass under Edward VI therefore, departing from that commitment under Mary Tudor meant serious consequences for the nation. According to Mason: "in the case of England where, under Edward VI, the magistrates and people had 'solemnly avowed and promised to defend' God's truth, Knox insisted that the terms of such a covenant still applied."<sup>103</sup> Unlike England, Scotland of the 1550s was not bound by the conditions of the covenant. It never officially embraced the divine covenant therefore; the consequences are different for Scotland. Knox

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<sup>103</sup> Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, xx.

argued, however, that the responsibility of the civil authority was to move Scotland in the direction of the Reformation, and to restore the nation to the true covenanted relationship with God. This could only happen through the removal of the idolatrous Roman Catholic Mass, and building the nation on the true biblical foundations of religion. Knox pleaded his case before Mary Queen of Scots that the Mass is an abomination in the sight of God. He says, “the papists allege, and boldly have affirmed, that is the mass is the ordinance of God and the institution of Jesus Christ, and a sacrifice for the sins of the quick and the dead. We deny both the one and the other and affirm that the mass as it is now used is nothing but the invention of man, and therefore is an abomination before God and no sacrifice that ever God commanded.”<sup>104</sup> Knox believed that it was the responsibility of the civil magistrates to remove the Mass and reform religion in accordance with God’s law in the realm. Knox says,

And therefore, my Lords, to return to you, seeing that God hath armed your hands with the sword of justice, seeing that His law most straitly commandeth idolaters and false prophets to be punished with death, and that you be placed above your subjects to reign as fathers over their children; and further, seeing that not only I, but with me many thousand famous, godly and learned persons, accuse your bishops and the whole rabble of the papistical clergy of idolatry, of murder and of blasphemy against God committed, it appertainth to your Honours to be vigilantly and careful in so weighty a matter.<sup>105</sup>

In order to achieve the goal of reforming religion in Scotland and England through the removal of the Catholic Mass, it meant a direct confrontation with the civil authority in the person of Queen Mary in England, or with the Regent and later with Mary Queen of Scots in the case of Scotland. The religious leaders and some of the nobles in Scotland

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<sup>104</sup> Knox’s address to the queen is recorded in his *History*. I cite from Knox *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 180; see also, *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 2, 277-286.

<sup>105</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 110.

considered themselves both Catholics and defenders of the Roman Church. Therefore this inevitable confrontation with both religious and civil authority led Knox to develop as a political theory of whom and how the realm of the nation should be ruled and what are the rules of the civil magistrates in promoting and defending true religion in the nation.

We should point out that throughout Knox's life and career in ministry he faced enormous challenges with the civil authorities. At the beginning of Knox's public life and ministry, he ended up with the so-called group of Castilians that was responsible for the killing of Cardinal Beaton.<sup>106</sup> As we have seen, owing to his indirect involvement in that situation, Knox was shipped as a slave to the French galley. Later on, Knox challenged the leadership of Mary Tudor, Catholic Queen of England. This resulted in his hasty departure from England to Europe and the writing of *The First Blast of the Trumpet* in which he compared Mary Tudor to Jezebel, the pagan queen in the Old Testament. Knox says, "wonder it is that amongst so many pregnant wits as the Isle of Great Brittain hath produced, so many godly and zealous preachers as England did sometime nourish, and amongst so many learned and men of grave judgment as this day by Jezebel are exiled."<sup>107</sup>

Knox simply could not stay out of trouble when it came to issues relating to the politics of the nation. Knox's involvement in the affairs of the nation was not out of a personal motivation to become a secular leader one-day. Rather, it was done out of an earnest desire to reform his native country of Scotland and to restore it to a true worshipper of the Living God. Knox was fully aware of the influence that both England and France exercised over Scotland. In his view, it was much better for Scotland to ally itself with the

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<sup>106</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 18.

<sup>107</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 3.

Protestant movement in England than Catholic France for Knox took his ministry to England and spent years serving in Berwick aiding and supporting the cause of the reformation in England.<sup>108</sup> At the same time, England had to stay faithful to the covenant established under King Edward VI and to not return to the Catholic beliefs as Mary Tudor had attempted to do because if that was to come about, both England and Scotland would fall under the punishment and judgment of God.

As we examine Knox's theory of resistance, one can notice that Knox had a moderate level of support for the notion of active political resistance over the years--even at a very early stage in his career. His association with the Castilians who challenged the authority of the Regent Mary of Guise is evidence that Knox was willing to support a rebellion against both the religious and political establishments.<sup>109</sup> His years in England and the subsequent political and religious events that followed the rise of Mary Tudor to the English throne, led him seriously to consider the option of active political resistance towards an idolatrous Sovereign who would not be persuaded to repent and follow the commandments and Laws of God.

Quentin Skinner placed Knox in the so-called "Calvinistic" camp with respect to the question of political resistance.<sup>110</sup> As mentioned above in chapter one, Calvin envisioned a proactive role for the lesser magistrates, which involved not only the administration of justice in the nation, but also the promotion and protection of God's laws.<sup>111</sup> This view is definitely reflected in Knox's own views on the role of the lesser magistrates in the nation. Skinner

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<sup>108</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 32-33.

<sup>109</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 18.

<sup>110</sup> Quentin Skinner, *The Foundation of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, *The Age of Reformation*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 211.

<sup>111</sup> Calvin, *Institutio* 4.20.9, ed. McNeill and trans. Battle, 1495.

pointed out that the political threat of the reformation movement looming over continental Europe was a real one. In Germany, France, and England, the reformers were in deep trouble, facing serious threats to the very existence of the whole reformation movement.<sup>112</sup> For the reformers to speak and reflect on the notion of active resistance to the idolatrous Kings and Queens was not merely a theoretical exercise, but rather a practical one.

In Knox's case, he was chased from his ministry for the second time because of his opposition to the rule of a Catholic sovereign in England.<sup>113</sup> In addition, some of his friends in England were living under direct persecution from the Catholic Queen. Therefore, it was very natural for Knox to seek answers to the unfortunate events that were happening. Knox sought the advice of some reformers in Switzerland specifically concerning a number of questions. The first question is related to whether a child should be allowed to rule over the realm even if he is too young. The second question: if a female has the divine right to rule over the kingdom and if she rules does she have the right to transfer her sovereignty to her Husband? The third question: should obedience be offered to an idolatrous Magistrate who enforces idolatry and condemns true religion? The fourth question: should religious nobilities resist an idolatrous sovereign and to which party should godly people attach themselves?<sup>114</sup>

Knox directed these questions first to Calvin, who was quick to point out the dangers of allowing subjects to resist an idolatrous ruler by force since that could lead to the disintegration of society. Moreover, as for the rule of women, Calvin "took the conventional view that it was against nature for women to govern."<sup>115</sup> Knox was not satisfied with these

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<sup>112</sup> Skinner, *The foundation of political thought*, vol. 2, 191.

<sup>113</sup> Sefton, *Knox*, 13.

<sup>114</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 219, 226, also see Marshall, *Knox*, 70.

<sup>115</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 71.

answers so Calvin sent him to Bullinger in Zurich for further advice. Bullinger was willing to go further with the question of resistance, and even though he did not support rebellion by the people in the realm, he agreed that if tyrants ruled the nation “God would give devout people the opportunity to overthrow them in the end.”<sup>116</sup> In a letter sent from Bullinger to Calvin on 26 March 1554, he enclosed his answers to Knox's questions. Concerning the question of whether it is lawful for a child to rule the realm even at an early age, Bullinger pointed out that it is indeed possible for a child to rule. Citing the case of Edward VI, Bullinger provided the necessary justification, he claimed, “for his [Edward VI] Father on his death-bed appointed him king...[and] the States of the Kingdom acknowledged him as they testified by his coronation.”<sup>117</sup> With regard to the question of female rule and transfer of power to her husband, Bullinger stated, “the law of God ordains the woman to be in subjection, and not to rule.”<sup>118</sup> But on the other hand, Bullinger warned of rebellions against a lawfully appointed queen. Bullinger pointed out that if that queen does not abide with God's laws and act in an ungodly manner, “the Lord will in his own time destroy unjust governments by his own people, to whom he will supply proper qualifications for this purpose.”<sup>119</sup> It is clear from Bullinger's words here that he is not in favour of public rebellion but rather of an aristocratic one, rebellion by certain people who are qualified by God to do so and remove the idolatrous kings or queens. Moreover, in regard if whether godly people should attach themselves to the nobles in the event of the nobles' armed resistance to the ungodly sovereign; Bullinger again approached the matter with great

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<sup>116</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 71.

<sup>117</sup> *The Works of Knox*, vol. 3, ed. Laing, 221.

<sup>118</sup> *The Works of Knox*, vol. 3, ed. Laing, 222.

<sup>119</sup> *The Works of Knox*, vol. 3, ed. Laing, 223.



reluctance leaving it to the discernment of every godly person to "obey the impulses of the Holy Ghost."<sup>120</sup> Marshall points out that Knox was not fully satisfied with all these answers; nevertheless, he was able to obtain both Calvin and Bullinger views on the issues.<sup>121</sup>

If these are some of the answers that were given to Knox by other magisterial reformers, what then is Knox's view on these issues and others related to the relationship between church and nation? In this coming section, we shall first examine Knox's views on the question of who should rule the realm. For example, we will be considering Knox's *Blast of the Trumpet* and *the Appellation*.

#### **A. Knox's definition of the Godly Prince**

Knox had a very specific view on who should rule the godly commonwealths that he was hoping to see established in both England and Scotland. Mason says, "His aim [Knox] was the establishment of a godly commonwealth ruled by a godly prince in strict accordance with the law of God."<sup>122</sup> Knox defines the main goal and purpose of the godly ruler, in regard to his responsibilities to God and his nation, was to know God's will and instruct his people. Knox says, "of these two places it [the moral Law and the instruction to the king in the book of Deuteronomy] is evident that principally it appertains to the king or to the chief magistrate to know the will of God, to be instructed in His law and statutes and to promote his glory with his whole heart and study, which be the chief points of the first table."<sup>123</sup> The king must then be reformed at heart, learned in the word of God and lead his nation in full obedience to the

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<sup>120</sup> *The Works of Knox*, vol. 3, ed. Laing, 226.

<sup>121</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 71.

<sup>122</sup> Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal*, 147.

<sup>123</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 29.

Law. It is interesting to note that the same view was held by Calvin, who believed that the true magistrate is he “who truly is what he is called, that is, a father of his country.”<sup>124</sup>

It is evident that Knox speaks of a prince, not princess, for in Knox's view, the godly ruler should be a male, not female. Indeed, the question of gender was of great importance to Knox. One can find this issue clearly addressed in his Treatise, *The First Blast of the Trumpet* where Knox clearly attacked the rule of women both theologically and naturally. In fact, the whole reason behind *The First Blast of the Trumpet* was to condemn the accession of Mary Tudor to the English throne for she was both Catholic and female. Although the belief has been that Knox's views on the rule of women reflects the common theological and cultural view of his time, there were some dissenting voices. As Amanda Shephard mentions, several of Knox's contemporaries thought otherwise and were supportive of women being more publicly involved in the running of the affairs of the nation.<sup>125</sup>

Knox first attempted to support his views by referring to the church traditions and appealing to the Church Fathers such as Chrysostom, whom he quoted in *The First Blast of the Trumpet*. Knox referring specifically to Chrysostom's interpretation of First Corinthians points out that the Church Fathers held a deep conviction of men's superiority to and over women. Knox lamented the fact that Mary Tudor had become the Queen of England by saying “what I pray you, should this godly father have said [Chrysostom] if he had seen all men of a realm or nation fall down before a woman? If he had seen the crown, scepter, and sword which are ensigns of the royal dignity given to her, and a woman, cursed of God and

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<sup>124</sup> Skinner, *The foundation of political thought*, vol. 2, 194

<sup>125</sup> Amanda Shephard, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England: The Knox Debate* (Keele, Staffordshire, England: Ryburn Pub., 1994), 92.

made subject to man, placed in the throne of justice to sit as God's lieutenant?"<sup>126</sup> Knox believed firmly that women should be subjects to men and they should not rule the realm and have authority over men, since they are cursed by God and made subjects to men.

After Knox made his case for man's superiority over women based on the evidence of the scriptures and the church fathers, he appealed to the "book of nature" to support his case. Knox points out to life within the kingdom of animals, where females are subjects to males rule and dominion:

for nature hath in all beasts printed a certain mark of dominion in the male and a certain subjection in the female which they keep inviolate. For no man ever saw the lion make obedience and stoop before the lioness, neither yet can it be proved that the hind taketh the conducting of the herd amongst the harts. And yet man, who by the mouth of God hath dominion appointed to him over woman, doth not only to his own shame stoop under the obedience of women, but also in despite of God and of His appointed order rejoiceth and maintaineth that monstrous authority as a thing lawful and just.<sup>127</sup>

Knox gives several reasons why women should not rule. Knox refers to women's rule as 'Monstrous in nature'. He says, "I am assured that God hath revealed to some in this our age that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire above man."<sup>128</sup> In his opinion, women are "weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish; and experience hath declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment."<sup>129</sup>

Why did Knox have such views on women's public abilities, in general, to lead and rule the realm? Let us examine some of his views on the matter and compare it with what some scholars have said about his views. First, Knox believed that a woman's rule could

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<sup>126</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 25.

<sup>127</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 25.

<sup>128</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 4.

<sup>129</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 9.

result in changing the religious faithfulness of the people through the influence of their Catholic husbands. Knox speaks of his fear that if women should rule over the realms of both England and Scotland, they may attempt to transfer their magisterial powers to their Catholic husbands. This would allow outsiders to control both realms.<sup>130</sup> Knox points out that women do not have the authority to rule, let alone transfer their powers to their husbands. He said, “but the authority of a woman is a corrupted fountain and therefore from her can never spring any lawful officer. She is not born to rule over men, and therefore she can appoint none by her gift nor by her power (which she hath not) to the place of a lawful magistrate.”<sup>131</sup> Of course, the background for this position by Knox was one of the greatest fears held by many Protestants in England at the time of Mary Tudor, namely that she would actually marry Phillip of Spain and transfer the Crown to a foreigner and Catholic.

The question took on quite a different tone, however, when Elizabeth became Queen, and there was some flexibility on the part of some theologians when John Aylmer was willing to leave the choice of a spouse to the Queen to decide. Nevertheless, he “recognized the danger that the marriage of a female monarch could bring, especially if she chose to marry a foreigner.”<sup>132</sup> Aylmer preferred the separation between the public office and private life of women and how women as individuals could both owe obedience as private individual to their fathers or husbands, and be owed obedience as a public individual as queens.<sup>133</sup> Aylmer rejected Knox’s claim that women were naturally subservient to men saying:

so the Woman being either a child to her father, or a servant to her master, or a wife to her husband, respecting these persons: cannot be head over them in

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<sup>130</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 40.

<sup>131</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 42.

<sup>132</sup> Shephard, *The Knox Debate*, 94.

<sup>133</sup> Shephard, *The Knox debate*, 92.

those offices: that is in the office of a father, a master or a husband. But in the office a ruler and a magistrate she may be this man's wife, that is his subject and his head, that is his magistrate.<sup>134</sup>

Aylmer wanted to prove himself a loyal servant of the crown and to secure an ecclesiastical office upon his return from exile. He was able to make that distinction between woman as wife and as queen to be able to rule and govern the nation thus appeasing Elizabeth I and ensuring her approval of him. Nevertheless, he echoed views that were expressed by at least some of the churchmen around Knox's time.<sup>135</sup> Such views by Aylmer were entirely rejected by Knox who saw the danger of allowing a queen to be able to marry a foreigner and transfer her authority to him as a sovereign.

The second reason why Knox refused to support the rule of women is their perceived lack of wisdom. He did not believe that women had the skills necessary to lead the nation, especially because of their lack of insight and prudence. Knox quoted the church fathers on this matter, again relying on Chrysostom. He says, "I know that Chrysostom bringeth in these words to declare the cause why false prophets do commonly deceive women: because they are easily persuaded to any opinion, especially if it be against God, and because they lack prudence and right reason to judge the things that be spoken."<sup>136</sup> Knox believed that God ordained men to govern as opposed to women, because women lack the ability to use reason. He described women as spoiled in their spirit, prohibiting them from attaining any degree of sound judgment or good government.<sup>137</sup> Knox also supports his views on this point by referring to another Church Father, Basil the great, who basically affirmed that the only role

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<sup>134</sup> Shephard, *The Knox debate*, 92

<sup>135</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 92, 101.

<sup>136</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 20.

<sup>137</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 21.

of women was to bear children and care for them. He said women are "tender creature[s], flexible and soft and pitiful; which nature God hath given unto her that she may be apt to nourish children."<sup>138</sup>

Thirdly, Knox opposed the rule of women over the realm because it was against God's law. In several passages from his *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, Knox spoke against the rule of women on the basis that it is contrary to God's law. Knox defended his argument by pointing to the passage where the Apostle Paul instructs women in the local Church to be silent during the public worship.<sup>139</sup> Knox argued that women should not speak, guide, and lead the nation in public, since they are instructed to be silent in the church. Knox said that women should not rule over the realm for the reason of obeying the Law of God, which inculcates them to be subjects to the Law of God rather than because of their lack of knowledge. Knox says "that she [woman] may never rule nor bear empire above man... so that woman, by the Law of God and by the interpretation of the holy Ghost, is utterly forbidden to occupy the place of God in the offices aforesaid which he hath assigned to man, whom he hath appointed and ordained His lieutenant in earth."<sup>140</sup> In Knox's view, the Apostle Paul takes away all powers from women, forbidding them to have any authority over men in the church as well as in the civil realm. Knox argued that, if Paul says that women should not rule or have dominion over men in the church, and then this should definitely apply to the realm that is greater than the church. Knox says, "but greater it is to reign above

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<sup>138</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 21, 22.

<sup>139</sup> 1 Cor. 14.

<sup>140</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 14.

realms and nations, to publish and make laws and to command men of all estates, and finally to appoint judges and ministers then to speak in the congregation.”<sup>141</sup>

On this, point Shephard mentions that some of the churchmen of Knox’s time disagreed with his conclusion that women should not be allowed to hold public office over the realm as queens or magistrates because they are not allowed to exercise spiritual authority in the early church. Shephard mentions Richard Bertie’s argument against Knox’s view on women’s silence in the church, saying that if we take everything literally then we misunderstand the scriptures. For example, we could say, “... because Christ did not judge in the temporal world, He could not judge in the spiritual.”<sup>142</sup> Shephard also mentions Henry Howard who made a clear distinction between public speaking and the activity of preaching the word of God. He argued that St. Paul’s famous passage only addressed the latter. Shephard says of Howard’s position that “he extrapolated from this that women could have public responsibility, and that if fulfilling their public duty necessitated public speaking, then that was acceptable.”<sup>143</sup> In conclusion, on the subject of defending the rights of women to speak publicly, Shephard mentions that different churchmen of Knox’s time had viewed St. Paul’s objection to women’s speech in the church as limited to spiritual matters and that prohibitions is not applicable to temporal matters, which includes women holding public office.

Continuing with Knox’s views, we find that he refused to allow the existence of some exceptions concerning the rule of women in the Old Testament to be applicable in his own

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<sup>141</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 14.

<sup>142</sup> Shephard, *The Knox debate*, 95.

<sup>143</sup> Shaphard, *The Knox debate*, 95.

time. He acknowledged that women played a leadership role over the realm in some events, but Knox insisted that these events should not be considered as the norm. He points out that men in the Old Testament were married to more than one wife. That in itself does not mean that polygamy should be the norm in the life of the Christian commonwealth that Knox hoped to establish.<sup>144</sup> Knox maintains that, if Deborah ruled in Israel or Huldah prophesied in Judah, that does not mean a change in the divine order and law: " And the law written and pronounced by God forbiddeth no less that any woman reign over man than it forbiddeth man to take plurality of wives, to marry two sisters living at once, to steal, to rob, to murder, or to lie."<sup>145</sup> In short, Knox is saying that the practice of something that is not sanctioned in the teaching of God's word does not make that practice right. This may give us a clue to Knox's own hermeneutics of the scriptures specially the Old Testament. The authority of the scriptures is of great importance; in his view, the Word of God is the source of legal precedents.

Knox also points out that God's instructions in the Old Testament are given to, kings --not queens. The description of the right and true leader of the nation is mentioned clearly in Deuteronomy where males alone are said to be capable of being chosen to rule over Israel.<sup>146</sup> Knox says, "here expressedly is a man native amongst themselves; by which precept is all woman and all stranger secluded... I say that the erecting of a woman to that honour is not only to invert the order which God hath established, but also it is to defile,

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<sup>144</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 32, 33.

<sup>145</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 33, 34.

<sup>146</sup> Deut.17: 14-15.



pollute, and profane the throne and seat of God which he hath sanctified and appointed for man only.”<sup>147</sup>

Knox insists that the moral law of the Old Testament is the source of the instructions that forbid women from ruling in the religious community as well as in the realm of the nation. What is interesting about Knox’s views here is that he believed that the moral law that governed the life of the Hebrews in the past was applicable today to govern the life of every nation that desired to be covenanted with God. Therefore, a Christian commonwealth where the nation had entered into a covenanted relationship with God and promised to obey His commandments must remain faithful to that covenant.<sup>148</sup>

Now, if this is Knox’s position with regard to the definition of the godly ruler and who should lead the realm and rule over the nation, then how did he finally reconcile himself to the political and religious situation in both Scotland and England? We know that women and Catholics ruled both nations at the time of his most famous theological and political treatise *The First Blast of the Trumpet*. This is why Knox approached his mentors in Geneva inquiring about the limit and scope of obedience to the civil authorities and the right to resist the ungodly magistrate. Their answers and Knox’s response will be the focus of the remaining part of this research paper, in the next two sections in this chapter.

## **B. Knox’s concept of Christian obedience to the King or civil authority**

We confess and acknowledge empires, kingdoms, dominions, and cities are appointed and ordained by God: the powers and authorities in them, emperors in empires, kings in their realms, dukes and princes in their dominions, and magistrates in cities, are ordained by God’s holy ordinance for the

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<sup>147</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 28.

<sup>148</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 28, 29.

manifestation of His own glory and for the good and well being of all men. We hold that any men who conspire to rebel or to overturn the civil powers, as duly established, are not merely enemies to humanity but rebels against God's will. Further, we confess and acknowledge that such persons as are set in authority are to be loved, honoured, feared, and held in the highest respect, because they are the lieutenants of God, and in their councils God Himself doth sit and judge. They are the judges and princes to whom God has given the sword for the praise and defence of good men and the punishment of all open evil doers. Moreover, we state that the preservation and purification of religion is particularly the duty of kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates. They are not only appointed for civil government but also to maintain true religion and to suppress all idolatry and superstition. This may be seen in David, Jehosphaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others highly commended for their zeal in that cause. Therefore we confess and avow that those who resist the supreme powers, so long as they are acting in their own spheres, are resisting God's ordinance and cannot be held guiltless. We further state that so long as princes and rulers vigilantly fulfill their office, anyone who denies them aid, counsel, or service, denies it to God, who by His lieutenant craves it of them.<sup>149</sup>

This quotation is taken from the Scots *Confession of Faith* which was authorized by the Scottish parliament in 1560 "as a Protestant statement of doctrine".<sup>150</sup> Knox clearly set his stamp on it.<sup>151</sup> However, Knox was not the first magisterial reformer who was concerned with the question of obedience to the civil authority. Both Luther and Calvin addressed that same issue at length in the theological and spiritual struggle to establish the church of the reformation. In this section we will refer briefly to the positions of both Luther and Calvin as precursors to Knox's position, for Knox was fully aware of the larger debate concerning the question of obedience in Continental Europe. Perhaps Knox was influenced to a degree by a Lutheran component of Patrick Hamilton's theology at the beginning of his study at St.

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<sup>149</sup> *The Confession of the Faith and Doctrine Believed and Professed by the Protestants of Scotland Exhibited to the Estates of Scotland in Parliament in August 1560 ... : A Modern Translation* by James Bulloch, Chapter XXIV, "The Civil Magistrate" (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1984), 22-23.

<sup>150</sup> *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, s.v. "Scottish Confession".

<sup>151</sup> Graham, Knox, *Democrat*, 184.

Andrew's University.<sup>152</sup> Later on, Knox shifted to more of a Calvinistic view during his time in Geneva and Germany.<sup>153</sup>

It is also important to note the political changes in England that occurred after the accession of Mary Tudor to the English throne. Mason points out that there was a great deal of danger to the English church on account of the tremendous pressure to conform to the Catholic rites and the Mass and thus to break the Covenant with God which was established under Edward VI. Knox felt a responsibility to guide the leaders of the English church who were stuck between two difficult choices; one was to break the covenant and return to the idolatry of the Catholic Mass, the other was to refuse to do so. Yet to disobey the Queen, who is the supreme civil authority in the Land, was to resist God through His representative on Earth.<sup>154</sup>

It was perhaps during this time that Knox was able to articulate his theory of limited obedience to the authorities, which he expressed in different writings that we are about to examine. Four distinct points can be made in reference to Knox's notion of obedience. First, there is the principle of obedience to civil authorities that should not be compromised or ignored in the life of nation. Secondly, true obedience is offered first and foremost to God. Through obeying God, his Word, and Covenant, one can then obey authorities that are appointed by Him. Thirdly, obedience is offered to the office of the magistrate and not to the individual who governs. Finally, obedience is to all powers and authorities including both

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<sup>152</sup> Marshall, *Knox*, 4.

<sup>153</sup> Skinner, *Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, 221.

<sup>154</sup> Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, xii.

superior and inferior magistrates--not just to sovereign kings or queens. In this section, we shall examine all these aspects of Knox's views on obedience.

### **1- The principle of obedience**

Knox believed that civil authority is divinely ordained by God to protect society, to maintain and to promote true religion within it. God has given civil authority the Sword to achieve these goals. In Knox's views, both the supreme and inferior magistrates are divinely instituted by God "...to reform religion in accordance with the Law of God."<sup>155</sup>

In *The Appellation*, Knox cries to the civil authority to render him justice from the unjust rule of the church courts under the corrupt bishops. Knox believed that civil authorities are ordained by God and are endowed by Him alone to render justice to his people. He says "that lawful it is to God's prophets and to preachers of Christ Jesus to appeal from the sentence and judgment of the visible church to the knowledge of the temporal magistrate, who by God's law is bound to hear their causes and to defend them from tyranny."<sup>52</sup> Knox believed that the principle of obedience to temporal authority is instituted by God and it involves all aspects of life in the realm, both temporal and spiritual. Knox believed that the church owes obedience to civil authorities because God independently ordains temporal authorities to promote true religion.

### **2- The theological foundations of obedience**

Knox believed that the nation had to have a starting point in order for the leaders to understand obedience to civil authorities in the right perspective. Obedience was an act of

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<sup>155</sup> Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, xviii.

submission to God first and foremost. Obedience to God's authority is the source of obedience to human authority. If the two contradict each other, then submission to God takes precedence. Knox said, "I have determined to obey God, notwithstanding that the world shall rage threat."<sup>156</sup> He was aware that the insistence of obeying God above man would mean endangering his life and maybe end it, but he was fully willing to pay that price. He said, "I know that the world offended (by God's permission) may kill the body, but God's majesty offended hath power to punish body and soul forever."<sup>157</sup> Knox was willing to choose offending the world rather than God because he knew his soul and body would perish if he offended God. He would rather receive earthly punishment from men than eternal punishment from God.

In Knox's *Appellation*, he reminded them of their responsibility of protecting the nation and obeying the command of God, which is superior to the command of men - even if these men were the church leaders who were actually attempting to punish Knox for his religious views.<sup>158</sup> Just as the kings of Israel obeyed God in the Old Testament times, the nobles of the realm should obey him no matter what the consequences would be. Knox says, "whereof it is evident that the rulers, magistrates and judges now in Christ's kingdom are no less bound to obedience unto God than were those under the Law."<sup>159</sup> God's people, the church, have called on godly magistrates in the past for help. As Knox refers to Augustine, he says, "in these first words Augustine showed three reasons why the afflicted church in

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<sup>156</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 7.

<sup>157</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 7.

<sup>158</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 72.

<sup>159</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 92.

those days called for the help of the emperor and godly magistrates against the fury of the persecutors.”<sup>160</sup>

The credibility of Knox’s notion of obedience was severely challenged after the events of 1559 when the commons rioted in the town of Perth, where Knox preached against idolatry and the Catholic Mass. The Queen Regent became furious with him and the whole Protestant movement. She ordered her troops to suppress the Protestant rebellion and end the rioting. In response to that, Knox warned the Regent and nobles that obedience is offered to the Queen Regent provided that she would not do anything contrary to the will or the word of God. The nobles would be compelled to carry up arms and defend themselves and the nation if the Regent acted unjustly towards the people. Knox says,

We signify moreover unto your Grace that, if by rigor we be compelled to seek the extreme defense, that we will not only notify our innocence and petitions to the king of France, to our mistress and to her husband, but also to the princes and council of every Christian realm, declaring unto them that this cruel, and unjust and most tyrannical murder, intended against towns and multitudes, was and is the only cause of our revolt from our accustomed obedience, which, in God’s presence, we faithfully promise to our sovereign mistress, to her husband, and unto your Grace Regent; provided that our consciences may live in that peace and liberty which Christ Jesus hath purchased till us by His blood, and that we may have His Word truly preached and holy sacraments rightly ministered unto us, without which we firmly purpose never to be subject to mortal man.<sup>161</sup>

This statement by Knox in his letter to the Regent was probably his most profound statement of his position on the question of obedience to the civil authority. Knox stated clearly that the only reason there was any sort of political disobedience towards the Rulers was on

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<sup>160</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 92.

<sup>161</sup> This is from a letter to the regent, 22 May 1559, found in Knox’s *History* as cited in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 150.

account of injustices and Idolatry. If freedom of conscience, worship, and religion were threatened, then this would warrant disobedience to the Rulers since obeying God and his commands took precedence over obedience to earthly kings and queens.

In Knox's encounter with Mary Queen of Scots, she was suspicious of his motives, accusing him of encouraging people to disobey by rebelling against her desire for them to follow the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Knox affirmed to her that true religion draws its only source from God and his obedience, not the desire of the kings or queens or their worldly wisdom. Knox challenged the young Queen by the Old Testament teaching and history where God's people in captivity did not follow the religion of pagan kings like Nebuchadnezzar simply because he was their sovereign king. Rather, they followed the religion of their fathers and their belief in the Lord. In the New Testament Knox referred to Paul the Apostle who put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ rather than following the religion of Rome even though he was a Roman citizen. Knox argued with the Queen that obedience to her does not involve religious matters especially if it means disobedience to God:

Madam (he said) as right religion took neither original, strength nor authority from worldly princes but from the Eternal God alone, so are not subjects bound to frame their religion according to the appetites of their princes. For oft it is that princes are the most ignorant of all others in God's true religion, as we may read in the histories as well before the death of Christ Jesus as after. If all the seed of Abraham should have been of the religion of Pharaoh, whom to they were long subjects, I pray you, Madam, what religion should there have been in the world? Alternatively, if all men in the days of the Apostles should have been of the religion of the Roman emperors, what religion should there have been upon the face of the earth? Daniel and his fellows were subjects to Nebuchadnezzar and unto Darius, and yet, Madam, they would not be of their religion, neither of the one or the other.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Knox, *History*, as cited in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 178.

It appears that Knox relates the question of obedience to the temporal authority with obedience to God. When matters enter into the realm of religion, civil authorities should not overstep their boundaries and attempt to force their beliefs on the people. The spiritual leadership of the nation ultimately belonged to the church and its leaders—not to kings and queens. However, the civil authorities had the responsibility of protecting and defending the people from tyranny in religious leadership if it promoted idolatries and false teaching. Summarizing Knox's words to the Queen and his response to her accusation that he was inciting political rebellion against her, he said "God forbid that ever I take upon me to command any to obey me, or yet to set subjects at liberty to do what pleaseth them. But my travail is that both princes and subjects obey God."<sup>163</sup>

Knox seems to be taking more of a Lutheran approach to the rule of civil authorities rather than a Calvinistic one. On one hand, he wants the lesser magistrates to defend the people from the Catholic kings and queens, thus facilitating true religion under the banner of the Protestant faith. On the other hand, he denies and refuses any attempt by the Catholic sovereigns to impose their religious beliefs on the people thus affirming the Lutheran doctrine that the "two kingdoms," earthly and spiritual, should not be mixed together. Indeed that is a Lutheran position, which is expressed in Luther's treatise, *Temporal Authority to What Extent it Should be Obeyed* where Luther speaks of the need to distinguish between the limit and scope of each kingdom, the kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World. Luther states, "for this reason God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which

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<sup>163</sup> Knox's address to the Queen is contained in his *History* (Lang MS, fos. 305r-308r, and in Laing, *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 277-86). I cite the edited text in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 179.



restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that-no thanks to them-they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace.”<sup>164</sup> It is very clear that Luther promoted more of an external role for the civil authority in the nation, rather than an active promotion of religious belief; the civil authority is just to maintain in Luther’s words “an outward peace” and not to interfere with spiritual matters, which belongs to the kingdom of God and his servants.

Surely, Knox has employed the Lutheran concept of the “two-kingdom” relationship between the Nation and the Church to suit his program for reformation in Scotland. Knox wants the civil magistrates to mind their own business when it comes to the practice of religion if those magistrates are Catholics. Nonetheless, if the magistrates have Protestant tendencies then Knox shifts to more of a Calvinistic view for he wants them to carry out a more active role and remove the catholic elements of religion. Knox considered the catholic elements in religion as pagan, idolatrous practice, which the magistrates should remove and promote true religion in their place. In summary, Knox’s position is that obedience to God takes precedence over obedience to the civil authorities.

### **3. Obedience is offered primarily to the office not the person of the Magistrate**

All authority which God hath established is good and perfect, and is to be obeyed of all men, yea, under the pain of damnation. However, do you not understand that there is a great difference between the authority, which is God's ordinance, and the persons of those, which are placed in authority? The authority and God's never do wrong; for it command that vice and wicked men be punished, and virtue, with virtuous men and just, be maintained. Nevertheless, the corrupt person placed in this authority may offend, and most commonly does the contrary hereof; and is then the corruption of the person to be followed by reason that he is clad with the name of the authority? Alternatively, shall those that obey the wicked commandment of those that are placed in authority be excusable before God? Not so; not so. But the plagues

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<sup>164</sup>*Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1955-1986), 91.

and vengeance of God taken upon kings, and their servants and subjects, do witness to us the plain contrary.<sup>165</sup>

With these words, Knox exhorted the Regent and the nobles in his letter to them in 1559, reminding them that they should not take their position of authority over the nation for granted. The obedience that the people offer to them is offered primarily to the position or the office rather than to the person. One cannot help but notice another Lutheran influence on Knox's theology here with a clear reference to Luther's distinction between the public office of the magistrate and the private one. Luther says that "men can be classified either as public or private individuals."<sup>166</sup> Although Luther's concern was with the Christian individual's involvement in political life, he made it clear that when a Christian prince or magistrate exercised justice and defended the oppressed, he does that in his capacity as a public person rather than a private person. He does it in the name of the office and the sword he bears is from God - not in his own personal name or for his own political ambitions. Luther says, "it is a necessary function [public office] to punish and judge evil men, to vindicate and defend the oppressed, because it is not they but God who does this."<sup>167</sup> Similarly, Knox warns the Regent and the nobles that they should not desire to achieve personal gain in the exercise of political authority just because God appoints them as rulers. Obedience is offered to the office rather than the person of the magistrate.

In his *Appellation*, Knox warned them of the danger of not confronting the ungodly king simply because he is ordained by God. For obedience is offered to kings as God's

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<sup>165</sup> This letter to the regent is contained in Knox's *History* (Lang MS, fos. 133v-118r, Laing ed., *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 397-412). I cite the edited text in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 154.

<sup>166</sup> *Martin Luther's basic theological writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 304.

<sup>167</sup> *Luther's basic writings*, ed. Lull, 305.

vicars on earth rather than as individuals. He says, “For it is no less blasphemy to say that God hath commanded kings to be obeyed when they command impiety than to say that God by His precept is author and maintainer of all inequity.”<sup>168</sup> Therefore, obedience is offered to the office of the King rather than to the person. If the person who bears the office of kingship does not submit to God’s commands and authority, then he/she loses the right to govern and the nobles should carry out the responsibility of deposing him/her. The debate of the general assembly, which took place in June 1564, sums up his position thus: “the plain words of the apostle make the difference, and the facts of many approved by God, prove my affirmative. First, the apostle affirms that the powers are ordained of God and the power is given unto man is one thing, and the person clad with the power or with the authority is another.”<sup>169</sup>

#### **4. Obedience is due to all higher powers**

As previously pointed out, Knox advocated the theory of obedience to all powers within the realm. In Knox’s letter to the nobility of Scotland, he affirmed the authority of the godly prince over the corrupt churchmen of the land. Knox believed that the authority of the civil government was over and above the church’s authority, particularly in the area of civil affairs and social order. Knox used the Apostle Paul’s argument in Romans: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God”.<sup>170</sup> Of great importance to all the magisterial

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<sup>168</sup> *The Appellation* in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 96.

<sup>169</sup> This debate at the 1564 General Assembly is contained in Knox’s *History* (in *Works*, ed. Lang, vol. 2, 425-61) as cited in Knox *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 191.

<sup>170</sup> Rom. 13:1 (R.S.V.).

reformers is Knox's comment on this passage in his *Appellation to the nobles of Scotland*: "neither Christ neither His apostles hath given any assurance of this immunity and privilege which men of church (as they will be termed) do this day claim."<sup>171</sup> He concludes by appealing to them for protection against the injustice of the Catholic bishops. Knox hoped that the nobles would subject the church authorities under their control and remind them that matters of the state should be arbitrated not through church courts but through civil authorities. As previously mentioned, this issue was of great importance to the reformers, especially the magisterial ones. The church authority is subject to the civil authority and powers. It is not for the church to exercise temporal powers in society. Knox believed that matters pertaining to the order of society and external peace properly belonged to the civil authorities--not the ecclesiastical.

Knox was very careful not encourage the crowds to rebel against authorities in general, but rather to trust the order that God has put in place in the realm where all authorities have to be obeyed. As we will examine in the coming section, if one of the branches of temporal government would become tyranny, then the other elements of the authority would stand up and remove the bad branches from the vineyard of God, i.e. from the nation.

### **C. The role of the lesser magistrate of political resistance**

It is evident from the preceding discussion of obedience that Knox has already sown the seeds of active and systemic resistance in his address to the question of dealing with the tyrant king. Knox offers what one could call a "conditional" obedience to the civil authority based on its performance in leading the realm. Knox prepared a system of accountability

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<sup>171</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 107.

where the lesser magistrates are encouraged to confront the tyrant sovereigns of the nations and even depose them if they continue to prevent the nation from keeping God's law, thereby leading them to break the covenant.

### **I-The supremacy and independence of the civil magistrates**

In this final section, Knox's views on the rule of the lesser magistrates of resistance will be examined. First, we will consider the notion of the independent power of the civil authority and its distinction from the clerical control and oppression. The Lutheran influence on Knox is evident on this point. Luther has advocated the view that since the civil authority has received its ordination from God directly, the church leaders cannot claim that they are the ones who provide legitimacy for its existence. Secondly, we will examine the duties of the inferior magistrates in particular their responsibility to reform religion, to defend and protect the true servants of Christ, to exercise and administer justice in applying the sword and enforcing the laws of God.

In Knox's *Appellation to the nobles of Scotland* to protect the nation from the tyranny of the Catholic Bishops, he reminded them that they have powers as lesser magistrates over the powers of the church bishops. Knox says, "I stand in your presence whom God hath made princes, your power is above their tyranny, before you do I expose my cause."<sup>172</sup> Here, Knox affirms two principles. First, the lesser magistrate's authority is derived from God directly. Secondly, he affirms that the affairs of the realm, including the exercise of justice and the use of the sword, belong alone to the civil authority rather than to the church authority. Although that notion seems quite simple to us in this modern day and age, in Knox's time this was

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<sup>172</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 78.

quite revolutionary. The church authorities used to run the affairs of the community. The bishops of the church were also called princes, and their control extended to other areas of life. In fact, in the case of Knox, the bishops passed a judgment of death upon him, proclaiming that he should die since he had taught and practiced false and heretical teachings.<sup>173</sup>

Knox refused to accept that the church would actually have such power in administering justice in the external political realm. He believed that this responsibility belonged only to the temporal powers, which are the civil magistrates. Knox gives several examples in *The Appellation* about the prophets in the Old Testament and the Apostles in the New Testament who actually appealed to civil authorities for justice. He believed he was entitled to do the same thing based on his belief that God had invested his power to protect the realm into the hands of the magistrates.<sup>174</sup>

In *The Appellation*, Knox reminded them that their authority is over all other forms of power, even church powers. If either the superior magistrate or the church authority embraced idolatry, then the lesser magistrates and the nobles had to put the sword into action to defend the Laws of God and remove idolatry from the realm. Knox believed that God had placed the Sword into the hands of the nobles to care for both the temporal and religious affairs of the realm. Knox talked about that authority in the context of the situation in England during the time of Mary Tudor where the introduction of the Mass took place again and the suppression of the Reformation teaching was violently taking place. Knox says,

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<sup>173</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 72.

<sup>174</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 81.

In such places, I say, it is not only lawful to punish to the death such as labour to subvert the true religion, but the magistrates and people are bound so to do unless they will provoke the wrath of God against themselves. And therefore I fear not to affirm that it had been the duty of the nobility, judges, rulers and people of England not only to have resisted and againstanded Mary that Jezebel whom they call their queen, but also to have punished her to the death, with all the sort of her idolatrous priests, together with all such as should have assisted her what time that she and they openly began to suppress Christ's Evangel, to shed the blood of the saints of God and to erect that most devilish idolatry, the papistical abominations and his usurped tyranny, which once most justly by common oath was banished from that realm.<sup>175</sup>

It is very clear in this statement Knox firmly believed that lesser magistrates should carry on the responsibility of punishing both civil and religious powers if they promoted idolatry and caused the nation to rebel against God and his commandments.

## II. The duties of the civil magistrates to reform religion

Jane E.A. Dawson has challenged the belief that Knox actually sustained strong views on active resistance through the office of the lesser magistrates. She suggests that his outlook on the matter developed over time in relationship to events in his life and ministry. Dawson suggests that, in his early career, Knox had the view that resistance to tyranny and idolatry belonged mainly to the ruler rather than the common people or even the inferior magistrates.<sup>176</sup> Dawson refers to Knox's words where he says, "shall we go and slay all idolatries? That was the office, dear brethren, of every civil magistrate within his realm."<sup>177</sup>

Dawson claims that this passage suggests that the responsibility of exercising justice in the realm belongs only to the superior magistrate. Dawson supports her argument by

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<sup>175</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 104.

<sup>176</sup> Dawson, "Trumpeting Resistance", in Mason, ed., *Knox and British Reformations*, 143.

<sup>177</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 194

referring to what J.H. Burns has said in reference to that question. He believed that Knox was asserting that the power to punish belonged “to the ruler and not to the inferior magistrates.”<sup>178</sup> One may argue against Dawson’s interpretation of this particular passage from Knox. Knox is not inferring that the right to punish the idolatrous belongs to the Sovereign. Rather, he is suggesting that every civil magistrate has this right, within his realm. This encompasses several local magistrates; not just the King, Queen or Regent of the realm.

Dawson agrees, however, that Knox later became bolder in respect to the question of punishing an idolatrous Sovereign, such as the Queen of England, Mary Tudor. This case likened by Knox to Jehu, of the Old Testament, who killed Jezebel, the pagan Queen. Dawson quotes Knox as saying “God, for his great mercies sake, stir up some Phinees, Helias, or Jehu, that the blood of abominable idolatrous may pacify God’s wrath that it consume not the whole multitude, amen.”<sup>179</sup>

On the other hand, Mason has suggested that Knox had “[a] limited theory of aristocratic rebellion”<sup>180</sup> which is the view point of this research, Mason notes that there is a danger in reading Knox’s *Appellation to the Nobles* as a full blown theory of resistance by the commons. Such a position is suggested by Kyle who, in his most recent work, says “Knox, of course, went beyond most of his counterparts in this regard and advocated popular

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<sup>178</sup> Dawson, “Trumpeting Resistance”, in Mason, ed., *Knox and British Reformations*, 144; see also J. H. Burns, *The True Law of Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 145, 148.

<sup>179</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 3, 309; see also Dawson, “Trumpeting Resistance”, in Mason, ed., *Knox and British Reformations*, 144.

<sup>180</sup> Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal*, 139.



resistance to idolatrous rulers - that is, Catholics.”<sup>181</sup> However this view is challenged by Mason who says that “[Knox] made it perfectly plain that while the nobility were bound to defend their brethren from persecution, they were under no circumstances to deny ‘lawful obedience’ to the regent.”<sup>182</sup> Therefore, the notion of a popular resistance is not fully supported in Knox’s views.

Contrary to the view suggested by Kyle, Mason warns against understanding Knox’s position on resistance along those lines evidence to them is offered as long as the rulers act in accordance with God’s law and not to ‘ultra vires’<sup>183</sup> Mason refers to what Knox says in that matter:

for it is no less blasphemy to say that God hath commanded kings to be obeyed when they command impiety than to say that God by His precept is author and maintainer of all iniquity. True it is, God hath commanded kings to be obeyed, but like true is that in things which they commit their brethren, the members of Christ’s body, He hath commanded no obedience, but rather he hath approved, yea, and greatly rewarded, such as have opened themselves to their ungodly commandments and blind rage.<sup>184</sup>

Mason argues that Knox’s theory of resistance is based on his doctrine of the covenant that has two applications in Knox’s mind. First, in the case of England, it is the duty of the magistrates to depose of idolatrous rulers and punish them when there is active resistance. Secondly, in the case of Scotland, the primary focus of resistance is to punish the leadership of the church for its corrupt religious practices that have caused the nation to rebel against God through the practice of the idolatrous Mass.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Richard G. Kyle, *The ministry of John Knox-Pastor, Preacher, and Prophet* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2002), 150.

<sup>182</sup> Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal*, 150.

<sup>183</sup> Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal*, 155.

<sup>184</sup> *The Works of Knox*, ed. Laing, vol. 4, 496; also see Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal*, 155.

<sup>185</sup> Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal*, 158, 159.

Knox envisioned more of an active role in the realm for the lesser magistrates. He believed that the lesser magistrates must have an essential role first, in knowing the true religion itself, and secondly, to promote and protect it. Knox talks about this concept in *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, where he says “Of these two places it is evident that principally it appertaineth to the king or to the chief magistrate to know the will of God, to be instructed in His law and statutes and to promote His glory with his whole heart and study, which be the chief points of the First Table.”<sup>186</sup> Also, in Knox’s *Appellation to the Nobility*, he reminded them of their responsibility to hear God’s voice and follow his precepts, defending the true teaching of the scriptures. Knox says, “that ye promote to the uttermost of your powers His true religion, and that ye defend your brethren and subjects whom He hath put under your charge and care.”<sup>187</sup> In the same treatise, Knox exhorts the nobility to take charge of judging between his teaching and the teaching of the catholic bishops, simply by applying the Word of God. Knox says, “For in the name of God I require of you that the cause of religion may be tried in your presence by the plain and simple Word of God; that your bishops be compelled to desist from their tyranny.”<sup>188</sup>

In Knox’s letter to Mary, Regent of Scotland, he reminded her that the responsibility to reform religion in the realm, belongs to her and not to the bishops or the religious leaders, and further that she should not attempt to unload that duty onto them. Knox said to her, “Knowing by what craft Satan laboureth continually to keep the world in blindness, I added these two former points, to wit, that ye should not think yourself free from the reformation of

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<sup>186</sup> *First Blast*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 29.

<sup>187</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 94, 95.

<sup>188</sup> *Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 111.

religion because ye have bishops within your realm,”<sup>189</sup> Knox continued to exhort the Regent to consider the laws of God and to reform the religious life of the nation. He appealed to the Biblical characters of the Old Testament kings who assumed the responsibility of reforming the religious life of the people as their first task and duty as sovereigns over their realms.

Knox says,

and therefore the most godly princes Josiah, Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat, seeking God’s favour to rest upon them, and upon their people, before all things began to reform the religion... if your Grace pretend to reign with Christ Jesus, then it behooveth you to take care of His true religion, which this day within your realm is so deformed that no part of Christ’s ordinances remain in their first strength and original purity.<sup>190</sup>

In Knox’s *Appellation*, he exhorted them to carry on their duties as magistrates concerning the reformation of the religion in the realm. Knox warned them of the danger that Satan may blind their eyes from the duty to reform religion with the idea that this work only belongs to the religious authorities. Knox says, “I am not ignorant that Satan of old time, for maintenance of his darkness, hath obtained of the blind world two chief points. Former, he hath persuaded to princes, rulers and magistrates that the feeding of Christ’s flock appertaineth nothing to their charge, but that it is rejected upon the bishops and estate ecclesiastical.”<sup>191</sup> Knox believed that the authority of the magistrates has that duty of being actively involved in improving and promoting the religious life of the nation.

Knox believed that the magistrates have the duty to reform religion and protect the true preachers of the reformation movement. In his *Appellation to the nobles of Scotland* Knox asserted his right as a minister of Jesus Christ to appeal and seek justice from the civil

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<sup>189</sup> *Letter to the Regent*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 59.

<sup>190</sup> *Letter to the Regent*, in Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 61.

<sup>191</sup> *The Appellation*, in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 87.

authority against the tyranny of the church leaders: “But because this is not my chief ground, I will stand content for this present to show that lawful it is to God’s prophets and to preachers of Christ Jesus to appeal from the sentence and judgment of the visible church to the knowledge of the temporal magistrate, who by God’s law is bound to hear their causes and to defend them from tyranny.”<sup>192</sup> Here Knox affirms the rights of preachers to complain of injustices against them to the magistrates. He also affirmed the right of the magistrates to hear such cases and intervene to protect the victimized party who were advocating and preaching of the reformation in Scotland. Again, in a letter of Knox to the Protestant nobility, he reminded them of their duty to come to the aid of the weak and persecuted. He says,

And further, ye lawfully may, yea, and thereto is bound to defend your brethren from persecution and tyranny, be it against princes or emperors, to the uttermost of your power, providing always, as I have said, that neither yourself deny lawful obedience, neither yet that ye assist nor promote those that seek authority and pre-eminence of worldly glory, yea, of the oppression and destruction of others.<sup>193</sup>

Knox attempts to use the civil magistrates as theological arbitrators between him and the Catholic bishops, hoping that simply reading the Word of God would allow them to understand his truthfulness and the blindness of the church leaders. The role of the magistrates is to reform religion and to discern true biblical teaching. This was an advanced expansion of the power and authority of the inferior civil magistrates, an eventuality for which both Luther and Calvin had sown its seed; but Knox has taken it much further. The

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<sup>192</sup> *The Appellation* in Knox, *On Rebellion* ed. Mason, 76.

<sup>193</sup> This is excerpted from a 17 December 1557 letter to the Protestant nobility and can be found in *Works*, ed. Laing, and in Knox *On Rebellion*, ed. Mason, 147.

duty of the lesser magistrates is to rise and resist the tyrant sovereign, whether that tyranny came from the superior magistrate or from the bishops it must be resisted; for this is the duty of the lesser magistrates under God. Knox's position here is less politically motivated than religiously so, since he believed that the lesser magistrates had a calling from God to promote true religion and to resist tyranny in the nation.

It is obvious that Knox's position on the question of active resistance was strongly influenced by his religious views, his desire to reform religion and the nation was not going to be an attempt to create reformation by the people but rather by the nobilities, for in his views that was the biblical model for reformation. That biblical model is to reform the nation through the godly appointed magistrates who have the duty under God to restore the nation to a true covenantal relationship with God. That shows that Knox was religiously influenced and motivated to blow his Master's trumpet and reform the nation. Thus, one can suggest that Knox envisioned something more progressive for the lesser magistrates. He visualized that they should assume the responsibility of defending true religion and should promote it. Ecclesiastical and civil powers are distinct for Knox, but not separate. He believed that both aspects of leadership in the realm, temporal and spiritual work actively achieved one goal, which is to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth and establish one nation under the covenantal relationship with God. This is where Knox's theology fits together: his prophetic ministry to call the nation to repentance and his desire to apply strictly the blessings and curses of the covenant of the Old Testament to the nation. His understanding of obedience to both civil and ecclesial authorities is closely tied with the notion of obedience to the covenant. Finally, he believed that the lesser magistrates primarily had the responsibility of

leading reformation in the nation if either the superior magistrate or the church authorities failed to do so. All of this ties together Knox's vision of the establishment of a nation under God.

## **Conclusion**

John Knox was religiously inspired in his promotion of the cause of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. By examining the historical background of Knox, it is clearly shown that he saw himself as an Old Testament-style prophet who was sounding the trumpet of God among his people. He was calling them to repent and to follow the precepts of the covenant with God. His life also revealed that he was committed in seeing the triumph of the Reformation in Scotland. While he has been and continues to be viewed by scholars as advocating a political program for the reformation in Scotland, it has been shown here that Knox's attempt to reform Scotland is religiously inspired and he used the Biblical model as his foundation.

Knox's concept of the Old Testament covenant, which God established with Israel, was his model and paradigm for a successful nation that wished to live under God's rule. He pointed to the example of England as a nation that had broken the covenant with God. This covenant that was established under the reign of Edward VI, was abandoned under Mary Tudor, who reversed the direction of the Reformation and reestablished Catholicism. Knox saw that all of the imminent trouble that England was facing religiously and politically was the direct result of Mary and her parliament breaking the covenant with God. Knox wanted the Church of Scotland and the nobles to take heed that many godly people were killed in England under the reign of Mary Tudor. He desired Scotland to establish itself under God's

covenant and remove all traces of idolatry from the nation, especially the Catholic Mass, and to confront any sovereign who supported its practice.

Knox viewed that the political make-up of a nation should be based primarily on biblical tradition and in particular on the Old Testament notion of the covenant. Knox wanted Scotland to make a league with God in which it committed itself to worship Him alone and remain in the realm of His blessings. Knox believed that the just ruler of the nation should commit himself to the service of God and his people and to promote godliness and justice in the realm. According to Knox, the people of the realm also have a duty towards the ruler. They have a religious duty to obey their sovereigns for they are directly appointed by God.

The lesser magistrates in Knox's views have a critical responsibility in the realm; they have to ensure that the nation is obedient to God through proper obedience to the sovereign, but they also have the duty to point out to the sovereign any deviations from God's laws. The lesser magistrates have the duty to resist the sovereign, even to the point of active resistance, if he chooses to disobey the commandments of God and practice Idolatry. The way Knox defines the vital role of the lesser magistrates is to ensure that the nation is biblically functioning in a way that maintains the covenant with God. The masses are not allowed to arise and resist the idolatrous sovereigns; that is the responsibility of the lesser magistrates. If Knox was advocating a popular uprising against the catholic sovereigns, then one can argue that he was seeking political advantage in the nation, for he was respected by the masses and they most likely would have chosen him as their leader. But Knox wanted to remain in his pulpit where he would do his favorite vocation, which was to sound his Master's trumpet. All he desired was to see the nation reforming and turning back to the



covenant with God. Knox believed that there are two aspects of the reformation of the realm; the first is religious and is epitomized by his duty as a prophet and preacher with his fellow protestant reformers. The other aspect of the reformation was political and that was the proper duty of the nobles of Scotland as the “ lesser magistrates” of the realm. He firmly believed that since God appointed the nobles they are the only ones who can bring about the reformation of the political establishment and thus actively resist the idolatrous monarch.

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